



THE LIBERTY "BOYS OF 76"

A Weekly Magazine containing Stories of the American Revolution.

Issued Weekly—By Subscription \$2.50 per year Entered as Second Class Matter at the New York Post Office, February 4, 1901, by Frank Tousey.

No. 185.

NEW YORK, JULY 15, 1904.

Price 5 Cents.

THE LIBERTY BOYS AND THE SENTINEL; OR, THE CAPTURE OF FORT WASHINGTON.

By HARRY MOORE.



The brave girls did their part of the work well. They talked to the sentinel, much to his delight. They took his musket and examined it with pretended interest. Dick pushed the cover off the basket, and rose up cautiously.

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The Liberty Boys and the Sentinel

OR,

The Capture of Fort Washington.

By **HARRY MOORE.**

CHAPTER I.

DICK AND BOB WORRIED.

"Halt! Who comes there?"

"It's me, mister."

"Who is 'me'?"

"My name is Tom Fender."

"All right, Tom. Come here."

It was a bright morning in the latter part of the month of October, of the year 1776.

The War of the Revolution was in full blast.

The patriot army was stationed at White Plains.

The British army had headquarters in New York City, but was not far away.

Only the day before it had made an attack on the patriots at Chatterton Hill, but had been repulsed, and now it had retired to a safe distance.

The above conversation had taken place between a sentinel and a boy of about ten years of age.

When the sentinel told the boy to come forward the little chap obeyed.

He was a bright little fellow, but he looked somewhat awed now. It was evident that he was not used to being around where there were soldiers.

He paused when he reached the spot where the sentinel stood.

The soldier looked down upon the boy pleasantly and said:

"What do you want, my boy?"

"I want to see Captain Dick Slater, sir," was the reply.

"Oh, that is what you want, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well; I guess you can do so."

"Where will I find him?"

The sentinel turned and pointed toward a certain part of the patriot encampment.

"The Liberty Boys are quartered over there," he said.

"Thank you, mister. May I go now?"

The boy hastened in the direction indicated, and soon reached the spot where the Liberty Boys were.

A number of the youths recognized the boy and greeted him pleasantly.

"Hello, Tom."

"What are you doing here?"

"Where did you come from?"

"What do you want?"

"Going to join the army?"

The boy grinned delightedly. He was acquainted with a number of the youths, and his admiration for the Liberty Boys was unbounded.

"Good-morning," he said; and then he added: "I want to see Dick."

"He's at headquarters," replied Mark Morrison, a handsome young fellow.

"Where is that?"

"Oh, a mile north from here; but he'll be back soon."

"Where is Bob Estabrook?"

"He went down into the village."

"Yonder comes Bob," said Sam Sanderson.

A bright, handsome youth of about eighteen years was coming up the hill from the direction of the village of White Plains, which lay at the foot of the hill, to the eastward.

Bob was well acquainted with the boy, and when he came up he called out:

"How are you, Tommy?"

"How are you, Bob?" was the reply.

"What are you doing here? Going to join the Liberty Boys and fight the redcoats?"

"No, Bob; I came here to see you and Dick. Your mother sent me."

Bob started and turned slightly pale.

"What's the matter, Tom? Anybody sick at home?" he asked, quickly and anxiously.

Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook lived about six miles from the patriot encampment. Their homes adjoined, and they had lived there all their lives. In July, Dick Slater had organized a company from among the youths of the neighborhood, and they had joined the patriot army, and had fought bravely in the battles of Long Island and Harlem Heights.

Tom Fender nodded in response to Bob's question, and said:

"Yes, Bob; your sister Alice is sick."

"Great guns! That is bad! Is she very sick, Tom?"

"Well, yes," hesitatingly, "pretty sick."

"What ails her?"

"Fever."

"What kind of fever?"

"Typhoid, I think."

Bob's face was very sober, and he exclaimed:

"Jove, that will knock Dick all out when he hears about it!"

Tom stepped up close to Bob and said in a low voice, so that the other Liberty Boys could not catch what he said:

"She is out of her head and keeps callin' for Dick."

Bob's face grew more sober than ever.

"I don't like to hear that she is so sick as that!" he murmured; "jove, Dick and I must go home at once! - I wish he would come."

He looked toward the north, and an exclamation of satisfaction escaped his lips.

"There he comes," he said.

A horseman was approaching from the northward.

Soon he was coming up the hill, and as he drew near it was seen that he was a handsome young fellow, keen-eyed and bright-looking.

It was indeed Dick Slater, and he was the captain of the company of youths.

He brought his horse to a stop near where Bob and the boy stood and leaped to the ground.

"How are you, Tom?" he said to the boy.

"How do you do, Dick?" was the reply.

"Say, Dick," said Bob; "Tom has brought us some bad news."

Dick started and paled slightly.

"What's the matter, Bob? Anybody dead or sick at home?"

"Sister Alice is sick, old fellow."

Dick started and turned paler still.

"Is she very sick, old man?" anxiously.

"Pretty bad, I am afraid; she has typhoid fever, so Tom says, and she keeps calling for you."

"Get your horse, quick, Bob," cried Dick; "we must be home at once!"

"All right; I'll be ready in ten minutes. You go on if you want to, Dick."

"All right. I'll tell them you are coming."

Dick leaped into the saddle and rode hastily away.

He went down the west slope of the hill at a gallop, and then urged his horse to a still faster gait when he struck the level road.

It was a six miles ride, but it did not take Dick long to get to within a mile of his destination. Then he suddenly found his way barred by half a dozen British troopers, who rode around a bend in the road and yelled to him to stop at the same time drawing and leveling pistols.

Dick was angry and disappointed. He did not want to stop. He was in a hurry to reach the bedside of Alice Estabrook, for she was his sweetheart and she was calling for him to come.

In the hope that he might not be delayed more than a few minutes, Dick brought his horse to a stop.

As luck would have it, he did not have his uniform on, but wore a suit such as was usually worn by the settlers of that region and time.

"Where are you going in such haste?" asked one of the troopers—the leader, evidently.

"I am going home," said Dick.

"Where do you live?"

"Up the road a mile or so."

"Why were you riding so fast?"

"My—sister is sick."

"Ah, indeed? And I suppose you have been for the doctor?"

"Yes."

"Where to?"

"White Plains."

"Humph. Why go to White Plains, six or seven miles distant, for a doctor when you could get one at Tarrytown, only a mile or so away?"

Dick saw the fellow was suspicious, but he answered quietly:

"Because the doctor I have been after is one who has doctored in our family for years and knows just what kind of medicine is needed and how much should be given."

"Oh, that's it, eh?"

"Yes."

Just at this moment there sounded the hoofbeats of a horse swiftly ridden, and then Bob Estabrook came riding around a bend seventy-five yards distant. He was riding as fast as his horse could go, and was almost upon Dick and the party of troopers before he could stop.

He managed to bring his horse to a stop alongside Dick, however, and he exclaimed:

"Hello, what's the trouble?"

"That's just what I was going to ask you," said the leader of the redcoats. "What is your hurry? Is your sister sick, too?"

"Yes," said Bob, "she is, and I want to go on. Let us pass."

But the trooper was now more suspicious than ever. "Don't be in a hurry," he said; "I suppose, then, that you two fellows are brothers?"

"No," replied Dick; "we are not brothers, but we live close together, and we are expecting to be brothers some day."

The trooper looked suspicious and skeptical.

"I think you are not what you pretend to be," he said, "it is my belief that you are a couple of rebels, and I guess that I shall have to ask you to surrender."

Now this was something that Dick and Bob had no intention of doing. They had been detained already longer than they liked, and they made up their minds that half a dozen redcoats should not capture them.

They exchanged glances swiftly.

They understood what each other meant.

They were to make a sudden dash toward the redcoats and get past them, even though they had to shoot some of the troopers down.

Suddenly they drew their pistols and urged their horses forward at a gallop.

The redcoats realized what the two meant to do, and they fired their pistols. They fired so hastily, however, that the bullets went wild; the youths were not injured.

The Liberty Boys knew that the intentions of the redcoats had been to kill them, however, and it angered the youths.

"Give it to them, Bob!" cried Dick.

Then crack, crack, crack, crack! went the pistols.

CHAPTER II.

BAD NEWS.

Dick and Bob were expert shots.

They had practiced shooting from on horseback, until they were almost as sure marksmen under such circumstances as when standing still on the ground.

Every one of the four bullets—each youth had drawn two pistols—found its billet. Two of the troopers were killed and the other two were wounded.

This left only two to contend with, and they evidently decided that prudence was the better part of valor, for they made no attempt to stop the two or to fire upon them.

On rode Dick and Bob at a gallop, and they were quickly around the bend in the road and out of sight.

"Jove, I guess those fellows will wish they had let us alone, Dick!" said Bob, grimly, as he replaced the pistols in his belt.

"Yes, those who are still alive, Bob."

"I guess we did kill a couple of them."

"I am sure of it, and the other two are pretty badly wounded, old fellow."

"That's right; well, they shouldn't have bothered us."

"True."

They rode onward, and a few minutes later were at the

Estabrook home. In reaching the Estabrook house they had to pass the Slater home, but Dick felt that his mother and sister Edith would not feel hard at him for going on to see his sick sweetheart. Bob was sure, also, that Edith, who was his sweetheart, would not feel hard at him for going on home to see his sick sister.

They looked toward the house as they passed, but did not see anyone.

When they reached the Estabrook house and dismounted and entered, they learned why they had seen no one at Dick's home; Mrs. Slater and Edith were here.

The youths entered silently, and then Dick asked, anxiously:

"How is Alice?"

"Just about the same," replied Mrs. Slater, in a low voice, and then she kissed Dick.

Edith had given Bob a kiss, after which she turned him over to his mother, and then she gave Dick a sisterly kiss, whispering:

"She is pretty sick, Dick; but don't be too much worried; we think she will get well."

"Is she still calling for me?"

"Yes."

"Oh, let me go to her at once!"

"Very well."

Dick turned and greeted Mrs. Estabrook and her husband, and then followed Edith into the sick-room. Bob remained in the sitting-room with the rest of the folks.

Alice Estabrook was, when in the enjoyment of good health, as pretty, lively and jolly a girl as ever lived, and Dick loved her dearly; even now, with her face flushed with fever, her eyes glowing unnaturally, her hair disheveled from much tossing on the pillow, she was the most beautiful girl in all the world to Dick.

As he approached the bed, he heard the girl murmur, "Dick!" Then immediately afterward Alice continued, "Dick, oh, Dick! Come to me! I want you, sweetheart!"

In an instant Dick was seated on the edge of the bed beside the sick girl. He reached out and placed his hand on her forehead gently, tenderly.

"I am here, Alice, little sweetheart!" he said, in a low, tender voice; "I have come to you."

Instantly the girl's head stopped rolling on the pillow and a smile of delight appeared on her face. "I knew you would come, Dick!" she breathed.

The youth bent over and kissed the girl tenderly.

"Yes, I came as fast as my horse could bring me as soon as I learned that you were sick, Alice," he replied.

Dick's presence had a soothing effect on the girl's fever, seemingly; she became quiet and was enabled to lie still and rest.

"Your presence here is doing her more good than medicine," said Edith.

"I am glad of it, Edith; and I will stay as long as possible."

"You must not leave me, Dick!" said Alice, grasping his hand and holding it as tightly as her weakened condition would permit of.

"No, Alice; I will stay here with you as long as you need me."

Mr. Estabrook went out and led the horses to the stable and unbridled and unsaddled them, and then went back to the house.

Bob had gone in to see his sister, and presently he came out, looking pretty sober.

"Sis is pretty sick, isn't she?" he said.

"Yes," replied his mother; "but I think she is past the critical stage, and that she will improve from now on."

"I hope so."

Then she went into the sick-room and looked at Alice with a solicitous air.

She placed her hand on her daughter's forehead and gave utterance to a little cry of delight.

"Her forehead is moist!" Mrs. Estabrook exclaimed; "the fever is beginning to break."

"I feel much better, mother," said Alice, with a wan but pleased smile; "I will soon be well."

"I think so, Alice," was the reply; "at any rate, you will soon be getting well."

Dick remained in the sick-room till noon, and left it only when called to the dinner-table.

All were feeling much better and more cheerful; Alice had taken a turn for the better the instant Dick arrived, and this made them feel happy.

About an hour after dinner was over Bob happened to step to the doorway, and as he did so an exclamation escaped his lips.

"Great guns! There come some British troopers!"

"They are looking for you and Dick, without a doubt!" said Mr. Estabrook. Bob had told him about the encounter with the six troopers as they were coming that morning.

Bob nodded.

"Likely you are right," he agreed.

"You must get out of the house and hide, Bob!"

"Why?"

"Because they are too many for you. There is a dozen of them at least."

"True; well, that would be pretty heavy odds. But I don't believe we could get out without being seen, now."

"I am afraid you are right. Well, you and Dick had better go upstairs, and I will talk to the redcoats and try to get them to go their way without bothering us."

"It won't be good for them if they try to bother us, father!"

This was said quietly, but with such grim emphasis as to prove that the speaker meant what he said.

"Go and tell Dick about the redcoats, and then go upstairs at once," said Mr. Estabrook; "I will attend to the British troopers."

Bob hastened to the door of the sick-room and motioned to Dick.

The youth told Alice he would be back soon, and then left the room.

"What is it, Bob?" he asked.

"A party of troopers, Dick!"

"Where?"

"They are almost here, old man; and we had better go upstairs, father says."

"How many of them are there?"

"About a dozen."

Dick hesitated.

Then he thought of Alice, and said, quickly:

"Come on, Bob; we must have no noise or excitement here, and if we can avoid trouble by keeping out of the way we must do it."

"You are right."

They made their way upstairs, and had just got there when they heard the redcoats begin talking to Mr. Estabrook, who was at the front door.

"Good afternoon, sir," said the leader of the redcoats, a lieutenant.

"Good afternoon," was the reply.

"Is there a sick girl here?" was the lieutenant's first question.

Mr. Estabrook looked somewhat surprised, and then said:

"Yes."

"Then we have come to the right place, I think. Are there a couple of young men here?"

Mr. Estabrook shook his head.

"No, there are no young men here," he replied.

The lieutenant looked skeptical.

"They came here, did they not?" he asked.

"Yes, there were a couple of young men here this forenoon, but they are gone." Mr. Estabrook thought that the necessity was sufficient excuse for telling the story.

"You are sure?"

"Yes."

The lieutenant looked at him for a few moments and then turned to his men and said to one of them:

"Go to the stable and see if there are a couple of horses there, and bridles and saddles," he ordered.

The man hastened away.

He was soon back.

He reported that there were two horses in the stable and two bridles and saddles.

"Then those young fellows are here yet," said the lieutenant, eyeing Mr. Estabrook sternly.

"You are mistaken, sir; those horses are my own, as are the bridles and saddles. The young men are gone."

"We cannot take your word for it; we will search the house."

Mr. Estabrook made a restraining gesture.

"I beg of you not to do that," he said; "remember, I have a daughter in the house, and that she is very sick. Any noise, disturbance or excitement of any kind may result seriously."

"We can't help that," was the heartless reply; "we are going to search the house—unless, indeed, the young men in question will come out and show themselves."

"They are not here," said Mr. Estabrook.

"We will soon see whether or not you have told the truth," the lieutenant said.

Then he turned to his men and said:

"Three of you come inside with me; the others surround the house."

The men quickly did as ordered, and Mr. Estabrook, of course, could not make the lieutenant and his men stay out.

The four entered and searched the house, room by room. They were, to do them justice, as silent and noiseless in their movements while in the sick room as possible. When they went upstairs Mr. Estabrook held his breath, for he expected to hear the crack of pistol-shots at any moment.

He was agreeably disappointed, however, for nothing of the kind happened.

There was no commotion, and presently the lieutenant and his men came downstairs looking disappointed.

"You told the truth after all, sir," said the young officer; "well, I am glad of it for your sake."

Mr. Estabrook was surprised, for he had supposed that the youths were upstairs; he could hardly keep his surprise from showing in his face.

"I usually tell the truth," said Mr. Estabrook, quietly.

When they had gone back out of doors the lieutenant turned to Mr. Estabrook and said:

"Those young men are somewhere around here, are they not?"

"Not that I know of."

"Which way did they go?"

"Southward."

"Do you know where they were going?"

"No."

The lieutenant was silent a few moments, and then said:

"I don't know whether you are telling the truth or not; but I will just say that if we succeed in getting hold of them we will make short work of them. They killed two of our comrades and wounded two others this morning, and we are going to get even with them for it."

"I know nothing about the matter," was the reply.

Then the lieutenant and his men went out to the road, mounted their horses and galloped down the road in the direction of Tarrytown.

As they disappeared around a bend in the road Dick and Bob came walking out from among the trees back of the stable.

CHAPTER III.

A SICK GIRL.

"How did you boys get out of the house without being seen?" Mr. Estabrook asked.

"We slipped out while you were talking to the lieutenant," replied Dick.

"Well, I'm glad that you did."

"So are we," smiled Bob; "had we not done so, we would have had to surrender or fight the dozen."

The youths remained at the Estabrook house till even-

ing, and then bade the folks goodby and started down to the patriot encampment. Alice was so much improved that all fears for her safety were dismissed from the minds of the parents and friends.

The youths promised to come back as often as possible.

When they got to the encampment an orderly told Dick that the commander-in-chief wished to see him at headquarters.

Dick rode on to the house where the commander-in-chief had his quarters, this being about a mile farther to the north.

"I wish to set you to work, Dick," said General Washington; "it is work that I know you will like."

Dick looked interested.

"I am always glad to do any and all work that is for the good of the cause, sir," he said.

"I know that, Dick."

Then he told the Liberty Boy that he wished an eye kept on the British, who were at that time encamped near Dobbs Ferry, over by the Hudson River.

"Go over there and watch them," said the general, "and if they make any unusual move let me know at once; and learn all you can about their intended movements."

"I will do so, sir."

He went back to the Liberty Boys' quarters in the main encampment, unbridled and unsaddled his horse, and then told the boys that he was going away on a scouting and spying expedition.

"Say, you are not going all by yourself?" said Bob.

"Yes; I can work better alone."

So he gave them such instructions as he thought necessary and took his departure.

He walked, for he did not know how long he might be away, and did not want to run the risk of losing his horse, which he valued highly.

So he set out afoot and made his way in the direction of Dobbs Ferry.

Dick knew this part of the country thoroughly, and could have found his way anywhere on the darkest night.

About a mile and a half from Dobbs Ferry Dick came to the home of a well-to-do farmer; at any rate Dick judged that he was well-to-do, for there was a large house and numerous out-buildings, including a large farm.

To Dick's surprise the big double-doors of the barn were open, and half a dozen lanterns were hanging up inside the building. He saw many persons in the barn, and they were moving hither and thither, or sitting down, busily engaged at some kind of work.

Occasionally laughter was heard, and the murmur of voices in conversation came to the youth's ears.

He was curious to know what was going on, so he left the road and walked toward the building.

He suddenly paused; he had heard voices close at hand.

They were low, murmuring voices when he first heard them, and then suddenly one voice was raised to a higher key. The speaker was a girl, Dick knew, and he heard her say:

"You must not, Captain Shannon! I am going back into the barn."

"Just one kiss, Miss Elsie," said a masculine voice; "what can it hurt?"

"I don't care to grant any such favors," was the reply.

"Oh, come now, don't be so prudish," insisted the man;

"I am asking you for only one kiss, where most men in my place would take half a dozen and not ask at all."

"I don't think they would do so," was the spirited reply;

"I would have something to say about that."

"Oh, well, give me the kiss, Miss Elsie."

"No. Please let us go back, Captain Shannon."

An angry exclamation escaped the lips of the man, and he cried, almost savagely:

"Jove, but I am going to have the kiss whether you are willing or not!"

Then there was a smothered cry for help, on the part of the girl, and Dick leaped forward.

He had just been able to make out the forms in the darkness, but now he got the two between himself and the lights in the barn and was enabled to see them pretty distinctly.

He reached out and grasped the captain by the coat collar and gave him a jerk, at the same time crying:

"You scoundrel! What do you mean?"

The officer, taken by surprise, let go of the girl and whirled and grappled with Dick.

"Blast you!" he hissed; "I'll have your life for this! You don't know who you are interfering with!"

"I know you are a cowardly scoundrel," was Dick's reply.

Then the struggle went on fiercely.

The girl showed that she was cool-headed and brave by standing her ground and not crying out. She realized that a champion had come and she seemed to feel instinctively that she was one who would be able to protect her and take care of herself.

Around and around the two moved, swaying and twisting. They tugged, strained and pulled at each other, each trying to get a hold that would give him the victory.

The captain was strong and athletic, but he was not a match for Dick. The Liberty Boy was a splendid athlete and extraordinarily strong, and he was especially good in contests of this kind.

Presently he caught the officer on his hip and threw him high in the air; the captain's heels described a circle in the air and down their owner came, flat on his back on the ground with a thud that must have jarred him terribly.

Then Dick held the officer, in spite of his struggles, and said to him, sternly:

"Will you apologize to the young lady?"

"Not at your command," was the hissing reply.

"Yes you will," quietly but determinedly; "you have insulted her, and you are going to apologize, or take the consequences."

"That is a matter between the girl and myself," said the officer, almost choking with anger; "you have no right to interfere."

"Yes, I have; the young lady called for help; I heard her and responded, and now you are going to apologize or take a thrashing."

The officer did not answer in words, but he made a sudden and furious attempt to throw Dick off and get free.

He failed, and presently ceased struggling and lay there panting.

"You—you!" he gasped; "I'll—I'll—kill you—for this!"

"Oh, I don't know about that," the youth said, quietly; "will you apologize to the young lady?"

"I will attend to my own affairs without any outside interference," was the snarling reply.

Then the girl spoke.

"If you will give me a promise, Captain Shannon," she said, "I will look upon this affair as though it had never happened."

"What is the promise? If it is anything intended to shield this young scoundrel from my vengeance you need not ask me to make it."

"That is part of it, Captain Shannon. If you will promise to give over your desire for revenge on this young gentleman and will escort me back to the barn at once, I will, as I have just said, look upon this affair as though it had never happened."

The captain hesitated, and then said:

"I will tell you what I will do. If this young—fellow will remain here and wait till I have escorted you to the barn I will apologize to you, Miss Elsie."

"I prefer to have it the other way," was the quick reply; it was evident that she feared that her champion would come to some harm at the captain's hands.

"Accept the captain's proposition, miss," said Dick. "An apology is due you, and as for me, I am amply able to take care of myself, and will be only too glad to remain here till the captain comes back."

The girl then reluctantly said that she would accept the officer's proposition, and Dick at once leaped to his feet and permitted the man to rise.

The captain hastily scrambled to his feet and then said, in rather a lame manner: "I am sorry I acted toward you the way I did, Miss Elsie; I humbly beg your pardon."

"It is granted," was the reply, but there was a troubled intonation to the girl's voice.

"Come on to the barn, Miss Elsie," the captain said.

The girl stepped to where Dick stood, and in the dim light he saw that she extended her hand.

"I thank you for your kindness in coming to my assistance," she said, as the youth took her hand. "I hope that—that—you will not—will not——"

"Oh, don't worry a moment about me, miss," said Dick; "I am all right, and am only glad that I was here to render you assistance. I have a sister, and I did for you what I would want that any man should do for her under like circumstances."

"Very chivalrous!" sneered the captain; "come, Miss Elsie."

The girl bent forward and whispered swiftly:

"Don't stay here! Go away, please!"

Then she turned and said to the captain, coolly:

"I am ready."

He offered his arm, but the girl refused to take it and walked stiffly along by his side, and with plenty of space between them.

Dick remained standing where he was; he had no intention of going away and evading the officer.

He saw the two enter the barn, saw the captain bow to Elsie and turn back, and then he saw the captain advancing toward him.

When the British officer was within a dozen feet of Dick there came the sharp crack of a pistol and the captain threw up his arms, uttered a cry of agony and fell at full length upon his face on the ground.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MYSTERIOUS VOICE.

Dick was startled and horrified.

The shot had come from behind and to one side of him, and it had come so unexpectedly that Dick was startled, as has been said.

The youth ran forward and knelt beside the captain. He turned the officer over and looked at his face as well as he could in the faint light from the lanterns in the barn. Then he felt over the stricken man's heart and could not feel any beating of the organ. He felt of the man's face; it was cold; so were the hands.

"He is dead!" thought Dick, a feeling of horror at his heart, and then he found himself seized and thrown to the ground.

The pistol-shot had been heard in the barn, and Elsie Vandiver at once leaped to the conclusion that the captain and her champion had become engaged in an encounter and that one or the other had fired the shot and had perhaps killed the other. She had at once communicated her fears to a number of the young people who were in the barn engaged in husking corn—this was a husking-bee—and they had rushed out to see about the matter. Of course, some of the men were in the lead; there were three or four British soldiers and half a dozen young men of the neighborhood.

They reached the spot where the dead man lay and found Dick bending over the body, and at once leaped to the conclusion that he was the murderer.

So they seized him and made him a prisoner in a jiffy.

They then made an examination of the captain by the light of a lantern that one of the men brought from the barn and quickly saw that he was dead.

"And you murdered him!" cried another British officer, pointing his finger at Dick.

The girls had drawn back, when the men said that the captain was dead, and were standing at a little distance staring in horror at the outstretched form of the officer.

"You are mistaken, sir," said Dick; "I did not shoot the captain."

"Oh, of course you would say so!" sneeringly.

"It is true; I know no more who killed him than you do."

"That will do to tell, but not to believe."

At this moment Elsie Vandiver pushed her way forward and appeared beside the captain who was accusing Dick.

"I am sure that this young man did not shoot the captain," she said; "he is incapable of doing such a thing."

"Why do you think so?" the officer asked, looking at her curiously.

"I will tell you," she said; and then she told how the captain had tried to kiss her against her will, and how the young stranger had interfered and forced the captain to behave himself. "And any young man who would do what he did could not be capable of committing murder," she added, in conclusion.

"That may be your firm belief in the matter, Miss Vandiver," said the officer; "but you will pardon me if I say that it is too much to ask me to believe it. I think the proof against this young man is conclusive. We will, however, give him a chance for his life. We will hear his story and see what he has to say for himself."

"I would advise that you look all around in the vicinity, gentlemen," said Dick; "the shot sounded from over in that direction," nodding to indicate which way he meant; "and the murderer might still be hiding near here, though it is not likely that he would do so, either."

"Look around, some of you," said the officer who had taken charge of affairs; then to the men who had hold of Dick he added:

"Bring the prisoner to the barn."

The soldiers and the young men obeyed the orders, and while some went to search for anyone who might be in hiding nearby the others conducted Dick to the barn.

At the door the officer turned to the girls and said:

"You had better go to the house now; what we are about to do here is not for your eyes. We will join you there when we are through here, and then we will have supper."

The girls, white-faced and awe-stricken, turned and walked slowly toward the house, where they were to have gone an hour or two later, to eat the splendid supper which had been prepared, and as soon as they were gone Captain Mahan ordered some of the men to bring the dead body of the captain into the barn.

This was done, and then presently the soldiers and youths who had gone to look for the possible murderer returned, with the report that they did not see any signs of anyone anywhere.

"I was sure you would not," said the captain; "but," with a glance at Dick, "I am a fair man, and I was willing to give you every chance."

"Well, I did not shoot the captain," said Dick; "and that is the truth."

"We will hear your story," was the cold reply; "tell it, as briefly as possible."

Dick told his story, simply and truthfully, and the sol-

diers and young men listened, but with an air that said as plainly as words could have done that they did not believe what the youth was saying.

"You have not made out much of a case for yourself," said the captain, when Dick had finished; "it seems to me quite clear that you murdered the captain. What do the rest of you think?" and he looked around upon the circle of faces.

"We think the same as you do."

"Yes, yes!"

"He's guilty."

"He did it!"

"He shot him!"

Such were a few of the exclamations, and it was evident that the majority, if not all present, believed that Dick was the one who had laid the dead man low.

"You see," said the captain, "the majority believe you guilty, and there seems to be only one thing to do under the circumstances."

"What is that?" Dick asked.

"To mete out to you the fate that is usually accorded to murderers."

The captain spoke sternly. It was evident that he meant what he said.

Dick realized this and his heart sank. He knew that he was in great danger, for the soldiers, believing that he had murdered their comrade, would not hesitate to put him to death.

He suddenly thought of something that promised a little in his favor.

"I think I can prove that I did not fire the shot that laid the captain low," he said.

"You shall have the opportunity," said Captain Mahan; "go ahead."

"Very well; you have my pistols there, have you not?"

The men had taken Dick's pistols away from him as soon as he was taken to the barn, and one said:

"Yes; here they are."

"Very well; if I had fired the shot one of the pistols would be empty. Look at them, and you will find that they are loaded."

This was done, and it was found that Dick had told the truth, of course; the pistols were both loaded.

"That does not prove anything," said the captain, after a few moments of thought; "you could have had three pistols, and after firing the shot you could have thrown the empty weapon away, and this is probably what you did do."

"Then if I did that the pistol ought to be found somewhere near the spot where the captain was shot," said Dick.

"It would be impossible to find a pistol thrown among the grass and bushes," was the reply; "I think there can be no doubt about your guilt."

"But, sir," said Dick, "if I had shot the man, would I have come forward and permitted myself to be caught bending over him, as was the case?"

"You might do such a thing, and you did do it."

"But I am innocent; I did not fire the shot."

The officer shook his head.

"Our comrade lies there dead," he said, slowly and sternly; "I am convinced that you murdered him. Miss Vandiver has told us that there was bad feeling between you, and that the captain was going to give you a thrashing, and it is plain to my mind that you, fearing him and not wishing to give him the chance to give you the thrashing, shot him down as he was approaching."

"You don't know me, if you think I would do such a thing to avoid the chance of being given a thrashing," said Dick; "and, besides, I knew that he could not give me a thrashing, for I had already got the better of him in one encounter and felt certain that I could do so in another."

"But you took advantage of him the first time; he did not have a fair chance. In the second encounter he would have gotten the better of you, and I have no doubt you knew this and took the means you did to prevent it."

"You are mistaken, sir."

The captain shook his head.

"You cannot make me believe that," he said; "I am convinced that you are the guilty man, and I am going to put it to a vote of those present whether or not you shall be hanged." Then he lifted up his voice and said:

"All in favor of hanging the prisoner, say 'I.'"

"I" went up in a chorus.

"All who do not favor it say 'no.'"

Not a voice answered.

The captain nodded his head.

"That settles it, then," he said. "You will end your life here and now, young fellow."

Dick's face grew grave, but he looked the captain unflinchingly in the eye and said:

"You are making a sad mistake, sir. I did not shoot the captain."

The officer shook his head.

"You would naturally deny it to the last," he said; "but I am confident that you did it, and so I will now pronounce sentence, which is that you shall be hanged by the neck till you are dead!"

He spoke solemnly, and then immediately turned to one of the young men and said:

"Bring a rope."

The young man hastened away and returned in a few minutes, bringing a rope.

"Tie a noose in one end and place it around the prisoner's neck," was the next order.

This was done and then the other end of the rope was thrown over a sill which extended from side to side of the barn, and a number of the soldiers and young men took hold of the rope and drew it taut.

"Now," said Captain Mahan, "if you will tell me your name and where your folks live, if you have any, I will see to it that any word you may wish to send to them will be delivered."

Dick felt that he was standing close to death's door.

If he was to die, and it seemed likely that he was to meet his death here and now, he would want that his folks and sweetheart should know about it, so he was on the point of telling who he was and leaving a message to be delivered.

ered when there came an interruption. A human voice, seemingly sounding from the rear of the barn, cried out:

"You are making a mistake. That young man did not shoot the captain. I did it. Let him go free."

CHAPTER V.

DICK IS SAVED.

The captain and all the soldiers and young men stared toward the end of the barn in wonder and amazement.

Who had spoken?

Where was he?

The captain was the first to find his voice.

"Quick!" he cried; "run around there and see if you can capture that person, whoever he may be. Hurry!"

A number of the soldiers and young men ran out of the barn and around it.

They searched thoroughly, but failed to find anyone.

They went back and reported their ill success to the officer.

He looked puzzled and thoughtful.

"I don't know what to do now," he said, looking half questioningly at Dick.

"I should think that you would be satisfied that I did not do the shooting," said Dick; "someone has said so, and it stands to reason that no person would accuse himself of the crime unless he were guilty."

"That is true, of course; but then it is possible that you had a friend with you who knows of your predicament and is taking this means of saving you."

Dick shook his head.

"I assure you that you are wrong, sir," he said; "there was no one with me."

It was evident that the captain was puzzled; he stood there looking undecided, but at last said:

"There is now sufficient doubt regarding your guilt to make it unjust to put you to death, so I shall let you go free. It may be, however, that I am making a mistake in doing so."

"I assure you that you are not," was the earnest reply.

Then the rope was taken off Dick's neck and his arms were unbound and his pistols were returned to him.

"Do you mind telling me your name?" the captain asked.

"George Hammond," replied Dick.

"Where do you live?"

"About fifteen miles from here farther up the river."

"Where are you going?"

"I was on my way to Dobbs Ferry."

"What were you going to do there?"

"I was thinking some of joining the army."

"Ah! then you are a loyalist."

"I am."

"I am glad to hear that."

Then the captain sent one of the soldiers to get a spade.

"We will bury poor Captain Shannon," he said; "and

then we will go to the house and see how the girls are getting along, after which we will have some supper. We cannot afford to let the captain's fate spoil our own happiness and enjoyment."

The soldier was soon back with a spade and a grave was dug not far from the barn and the dead man was buried.

Then all went to the house, where the girls were found, looking pale and worried.

When they saw that Dick was with the others they looked surprised, and many of them looked greatly relieved.

Among the latter was Elsie Vandiver, and she at once advanced and shook hands with Dick.

"I am glad that they set you free," she said, simply, but there was a look in her eyes that showed she was more than glad that she was rejoiced, indeed.

"So am I," smiled Dick; "I thought for a little while that I was to lose my life."

Then he explained briefly that the soldiers and young men had come very near hanging him, and that a mysterious voice proclaiming his innocence had saved him.

It was not a very lively gathering. The death of the captain had cast a gloom over all.

When, however, an hour later they sat down to the table, they managed to eat a very hearty meal.

Half an hour after they had finished eating the young folks began taking their leave. They were rather quiet; their husking-bee had not turned out to be the pleasant affair they had expected it would be.

The soldiers also got ready to take their departure, and the captain turned to Dick and said:

"What are you going to do?"

The youth shook his head.

"I don't know," he said; "I was thinking of staying here the rest of the night, if Miss Vandiver's folks can find room for me."

"We are not going to Dobbs Ferry," the captain explained, "or I would have you go along with us. We are on our way to New York City, and we happened to see what was going on here and stopped. It was unfortunate, for poor Captain Shannon lost his life; still, we must learn to look upon such things philosophically."

"You are right," agreed Dick.

Elsie Vandiver had heard what Dick said about staying the rest of the night, and she went to her father and told him, and he at once came and insisted that Dick should remain.

"Thank you," the Liberty Boy said; "I accept your invitation and will remain till morning."

"If you really wish to join the army go on to Dobbs Ferry to-morrow," said Captain Mahan; "they will be glad to accept you as a recruit."

"I may do so," said Dick; "would you mind writing a letter to the commanding officer, stating that you know me and that I wish to join the army?"

"I shall be glad to do so."

He called for paper, ink and quill and wrote a letter introducing Dick, under his fictitious name of George Hammond, and gave it to him.

Dick was glad to get it, as it might be of use to him, might indeed get him out of trouble should he be captured by the rēdecoats.

He thanked the captain and pocketed the letter.

Then the British troopers took their departure, first asking the Vandivers to keep their eyes and ears open in an effort to learn who had shot Captain Shannon.

They promised to keep a sharp lookout, and if they learned anything to let the British officer know it. He said he would be back past there in a few days.

Then they took their departure.

When they had gone, leaving only Mr., Mrs. and Elsie Vandiver and two or three servants, the girl came to Dick and said: •

"Who do you think it was that called out that you were innocent, Mr. Hammond?"

Dick started and looked at the girl searchingly.

"Surely you don't mean that you did it!" he exclaimed.

Elsie nodded, a pleased look in her eyes.

"Yes, I did it, Mr. Hammond. I knew you were in danger, and so I slipped back, went around behind the barn, and when I saw that they were determined to hang you, I decided to try the plan of calling out that you were innocent, and that I did it myself."

"But the voice, Miss Vandiver! It was a man's voice, I was sure."

"It was a very good imitation," with a smile; "I have practiced speaking pieces, and have learned so that I can imitate almost any kind of voice."

"Well, well! It came in good play, Miss Vandiver, and I certainly owe my life to you."

"And I owe you a good deal, Mr. Hammond; you came to my assistance when I called for help, you know."

"I was glad to do that."

"And I was glad to do what I did for you."

After some further conversation Dick asked if they had any suspicion who it could have been that shot the captain.

The Vandivers said they could not think of anyone who would have done such a thing, but Dick imagined there was a thoughtful look on Elsie's face.

"I believe that she has a suspicion regarding the identity of the murderer," he told himself.

A little later Dick was shown to his room, and soon the house was dark and quiet.

Next morning after breakfast Dick bade the Vandivers goodbye and took his departure.

He had gone only about a quarter of a mile when he was suddenly confronted by a youth of his own age, who said:

"Stop, I want to talk to you."

CHAPTER VI.

DICK OVERHEARS A CONVERSATION.

"Who are you?" asked Dick.

"My name is Ben Bingson."

"Well, what do you wish to talk to me about?"

"About that affair of last night."

Dick started and looked at the young man keenly.

"What about it?" he asked.

The young man looked worried.

"I have something to tell you," he said; "I have got to tell somebody; I'm the fellow who shot that British officer!"

Dick nodded.

"I suspected as much. But why did you do it?"

Dick was eyeing the youth keenly, and he was favorably impressed with his looks. The youth did not look at all like a cowardly assassin."

The young man flushed slightly and said:

"I'm Elsie Vandiver's fellow—or was till that captain began coming to see her; he has been around in these parts a couple of weeks now—and I was hidden near the spot where he and Elsie stood last night when she called for help. I was just going to jump out and knock the captain down, or try to do so, when you leaped forward and seized him, and then I remained where I was. I heard all, and when I saw him coming back to have his settlement with you, I made up my mind to help you. I was grateful to you for handling him the way you had in defense of Elsie so I just said to myself, 'I'll wound him and make him unable to harm the young fellow.' So I out with my pistol took aim and fired. I don't know how it happened; I can usually put a bullet where I want to, but this time instead of simply wounding him and disabling him I put the bullet through his heart. I didn't mean to kill him, and now I am a murderer, and I don't know what to do. I haven't slept a wink, and I don't know whether I ever will again or not."

Dick felt sorry for the youth.

He believed every word the young man said.

"I am sorry that you fired the shot," he said, gently; "for I was in no danger whatever. I am able to take care of myself under any and all circumstances, and the captain would simply have gotten a good thrashing had he attacked me. I wish you hadn't done it."

"So do I," sadly. "I don't think I shall ever get rid of this terrible feeling that I am a murderer."

"I don't think you ought to feel that way about it, Ben," said Dick, kindly; "you did not intend to kill the man and therefore you are not in reality a murderer."

Ben's face lighted up.

It was evident that Dick's words made him feel better.

"Do you really look at it that way?" he asked, regarding Dick earnestly.

"Of course; so far as the murder part is concerned, you are not responsible at all; you made a mistake in firing with the intention of wounding him, that is all, and that is not a very serious crime—not one to make your conscience hurt you or cause you to lie awake of nights."

The youth was plainly greatly relieved.

His face lighted up and the worried look disappeared.

"I am glad that I met you," he said; "now I shall feel

better. Of course, I shall always feel sorry that I killed the man."

"You will get over it after awhile, and I would suggest that a good way to do so would be to join the army and get into active life."

The youth looked thoughtful.

"I have a good mind to do that," he said.

"I would; it will be good for you."

"I will do it," determinedly.

"What are you, patriot or loyalist?"

"I'm a patriot."

"I'm glad to hear that; I'm one myself."

"I thought you were."

"Yes; and I am an officer in the patriot army, Ben."

"You are?" in surprise.

"Yes, I am the captain of a company of young fellows about our age."

"Say, you are not——"

"The captain of the Liberty Boys? Yes."

"Jove, I've heard a lot about you fellows, and if you will take me I will join your company."

"All right; you may do so."

"Good! Where are your Liberty Boys?"

"They are in the patriot encampment."

"Where is that?"

"Over near White Plains."

"Shall I go over there and join your company?"

"No, I'll tell you what you do. Stay at your home—it is near here, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, stay there till I am ready to go back to the patriot encampment, and then you can go with me."

"Very well; I live half a mile north of the Vandiver home."

"I will know where to find you then."

"Where are you going?"

"Over to the vicinity of the British encampment."

"To spy on them?"

"Yes."

"Can I be of any help to you?" eagerly.

Dick shook his head.

"No; I can do such work better alone."

"Well, if you should need me let me know, and I will be with you in a jiffy."

"Very well, Ben."

Then they parted, and Dick went on in the direction of Dobbs Ferry, while Ben started to go in the direction of the Vandiver home.

He had taken only a few steps, however, when a girl stepped out from behind a tree and confronted him.

The girl was Elsie Vandiver.

"You, Elsie!" cried Ben, advancing eagerly.

"Yes, Ben," motioning him back; "I heard your conversation and know that you killed Captain Shannon, and I wish to tell you that I can never permit you to come near me again. I hate a coward, and it was cowardly to fire a shot from the darkness in that fashion."

"But, Elsie," cried Ben; "listen to me; I did not intend to kill him; I——"

"I know that; I heard what you told Mr. Hammond."

"He is not Mr. Hammond, Elsie; his name is Dick Slater and he is the captain of a company of young fellows who are known as the Liberty Boys."

"Is that his real name—Dick Slater?"

"Yes; I have heard of him often."

"Do you intend to join his company, Ben?"

"Yes."

Elsie was silent a few moments, and then said:

"I am glad of that."

"So am I; and, Elsie, if I prove by my conduct in battles that I am not a coward, will you—may I——"

"I make no promises, Ben."

The youth talked to Elsie long and earnestly, and tried his best to get her to promise that if he became a soldier and proved that he was no coward she would look upon him with favor when the war was over, but she would not give any promise.

At last he gave it up and walked silently and sadly along with her to her home; here he bade her goodbye.

"Then I am not to come here any more, Elsie?" he asked.

"No, Ben."

"Very well; good—by."

"Goodby."

Ben made his way out to the road and walked rapidly in the direction of his own home. As he passed the barn he averted his face; he could not bear to look toward the spot where he had been when he fired the shot that laid the British officer low.

Meanwhile, Dick Slater had made his way onward toward Dobbs Ferry.

It had gradually clouded up since early morning, and now the clouds were thick and heavy; and the rumble of thunder and the flashing of lightning were heard and seen.

Then it began to rain.

It did not rain hard at first, but soon turned into a down-pour, and Dick hastened in among the trees looking for shelter.

He saw a large hollow tree near at hand, and got inside the tree; here he was protected from the rain, which continued to pour down for half an hour.

Then it slackened up, and a few moments later ceased altogether. Dick was on the point of stepping forth and continuing on his way, when he heard voices close at hand.

He remained under cover, for he did not know whether the men were friends or foes.

He was soon glad that he did remain concealed, for he heard a conversation that was interesting in the extreme. The two men were evidently members of a band of cow-boys, for they were planning to rob the home of the Vandivers.

They planned to do the work that night.

Dick gathered from their conversation that there were about a dozen in the band.

"I must see to it that they are foiled," he told himself.

Then he wondered what he should do. He wanted to

attend to the work of watching the British, and at the same time he wished to make sure that the scheme of the cowboys would be foiled.

He thought of Ben Bington.

"The very thing!" he said to himself; "I will send him to the patriot encampment after some of the boys, and they will attend to this matter while I keep my eyes on the British."

He waited till the men had taken their departure, and then he emerged from the hollow tree and made his way back in the direction of the Vandiver home.

When he was near there he made a slight detour and continued onward till he came to a house half a mile north. This house, he was sure, was the home of Ben Bington.

He was sure of it when, a moment later, he saw Ben emerge from the back door and walk toward the stable.

He called to Ben, who looked around, saw and recognized him and then came hastily to meet him.

"You here!" the youth exclaimed.

"Yes, Ben; I have some work for you to do."

"Good!" eagerly; "I am glad of it. But what is the work?"

Dick quickly explained.

Ben was delighted. His eyes sparkled. It was evident that the work was of a character to give him pleasure.

The fact of the matter was, that he was glad of the chance to pose as a protector of his sweetheart; then, too, it would give him a chance to show her that he was not a coward.

He said that he would bridle and saddle his horse and ride to the patriot encampment and bring back as many of the Liberty Boys as Dick thought would be needed.

"Bring twenty of them," said Dick; "that will be a sufficient number, I am sure."

"Very well; who shall I see there?"

"Ask for Bob Estabrook."

"All right."

"Bob is my right-hand man and will have charge of the party. He is a fine fellow, and you will like him. Tell him that you are going to become a member of the company."

"All right."

Then, having explained all to Ben, Dick turned and made his way back in the direction from which he had only a few minutes before come, while Ben went to the stable and bridled and saddled his horse and mounted and rode away in the direction of White Plains.

When he had got there and had passed the sentinel, to whom he explained that he wished to see Bob Estabrook, he made his way to the quarters occupied by the Liberty Boys.

He looked at the youths, who were sitting around in groups, and said:

"Is Bob Estabrook here?"

One of the youths leaped up and said:

"I am Bob Estabrook; who are you?"

"My name is Ben Bington."

"Well, what can I do for you, Ben?"

"I have a message for you from Captain Dick Slater."

Bob started, and an eager look appeared on his face.

"What is that? A message from Dick? Let me have it at once!"

"It is a verbal message; he wants that you shall come to a place that I am to guide you to and bring twenty of the Liberty Boys."

"Good!" cried Bob; "that sounds like there is to be some work to be done. When are we to come?"

"This evening."

Then Ben explained matters to Bob and the other Liberty Boys, who listened with interest.

"So that is what is in the wind, eh?" said Bob; "all right; you may be sure that we will attend to the work in good shape. We will make those cowboys wish they had stayed out of the robbing business."

Then he turned to the youths and said:

"Draw lots, boys, to see who will go with me. I don't want to show any partiality by naming those who are to go."

"All right, Bob," said Mark Morrison.

The youths went to work, and soon the nineteen who were to accompany Bob and Ben had been decided upon by lot.

They were happy, while the others looked disappointed.

As there was no necessity for being at the Vandiver home before dark, the Liberty Boys did not start until after supper. Then they set out and arrived there just at dark.

Ben Bington explained to Mr. Vandiver the reason of the presence of the Liberty Boys, and he was well pleased to learn that even though the cowboys were coming to rob him, they would not be permitted to do so.

Bob instructed him to remain in the house, and for the members of the family to go to bed just as usual.

"You need not fear," he said; "we will attend to the cowboys, and will see to it that they do not do any harm."

Mr. Vandiver said that Bob's instructions should be carried out. Then he thanked him for coming.

"That is all right, sir," said Bob; "we are glad to be here. We like to do this kind of work. Then, too, the thanks are due, not to me, but to Dick Slater, my commander."

After some further conversation, Mr. Vandiver went into the house and the Liberty Boys concealed themselves in the barn, there to await the coming of the cowboys.

An hour passed, and then footsteps and voices were heard.

"They are coming!" said Bob in a low, cautious voice; "wait till they go and attempt to break into the house, and then we will go for them."

A party of men passed the doorway of the barn and moved onward toward the house, and the Liberty Boys stepped to the door and looked after the men.

A few minutes later they heard the sound of pounding followed by a loud, imperious voice calling out:

"Open the door! Open it, or we will break it down!"

"Now is your time, boys," said Bob; "out with you and make a dash for the scoundrels, firing as you go!"

The youths obeyed.

They drew their pistols, leaped through the doorway and ran swiftly toward the house.

They had covered half the distance, when Bob suddenly cried out:

"Fire, Liberty Boys! Give it to the scoundrels!"

The youths obeyed the command.

Crash! Roar!

Loudly upon the night air the volley rang out.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE HAYLOFT.

The cowboys were taken wholly by surprise.

They had not thought of such a thing as that they were in danger.

Their idea had been that they would have no trouble whatever in doing as they pleased at the home of the Vandivers, and as Mr. Vandiver was known to be well-to-do, they had anticipated finding considerable that was of value; they even thought that they might get a lot of money.

Several of their number were wounded by the bullets and two were killed outright.

This was more than they had bargained for, and they fled at the top of their speed.

The Liberty Boys fired another volley, but as the cowboys had scattered, not much damage was done.

It was now over, and over very quickly. The cowboys had not much more than arrived on the scene than they were in full flight, routed completely.

Mr. Vandiver opened the door and looked out.

"Have they gone?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Bob; "and they went in a hurry."

"Did you hurt any of them?"

"There are five lying here; two are dead and three are wounded."

"Ha! Then they will wish that they had stayed away from here."

"Quite likely."

Mr. Vandiver then brought a lantern out, and by its light the wounds of the injured men were examined.

One was quite seriously wounded, but the other two would be able to get around again all right in a few days. When their wounds had been dressed they said that they could get along, and were only too glad to be permitted to go free. They limped slowly and painfully away. The seriously wounded fellow was given a place on a blanket on the floor in the sitting-room. After this had been done the two dead cowboys were buried.

Mr. Vandiver recognized them as a couple of worthless characters who had lived in the woods in the vicinity for several years past, living on what they could pick up by

hunting and trapping and doing occasional little jobs of work for the farmers.

The man in the house who was seriously hurt Mr. Vandiver had never seen before.

Bob and the Liberty Boys decided that they would remain at the Vandiver farmhouse all night; then in case the cowboys returned they would be on hand to put the rascals to flight.

There were too many to take up quarters in the house, so they went to the barn. There was a lot of loose hay in the loft, and this made a splendid place for the youths to sleep.

They stationed a couple of sentinels and then lay down and went to sleep.

They were not disturbed. The cowboys did not return.

Next morning Mr. Vandiver came to the barn and told the youths to come to the house.

"Breakfast is ready," he said; "and you are invited to come and eat with us."

The youths were only too glad to accept the invitation.

They went to the house and ate a hearty breakfast.

Ben Bingson was among them. He considered himself to be one of the Liberty Boys now, and had remained with them all night, instead of going to his own home, and so he felt that this gave him an excuse to go to the Vandiver house for breakfast along with the other Liberty Boys.

He tried to get Elsie to accord him a little more consideration than she showed the others, but in this he failed. She had no more to say to him than to any of the rest.

This did not please him very much; he felt blue, but contained himself as best he could, and tried not to let the other youths see how it was with him.

There were some shrewd young fellows sitting around the table, however, and they noticed what was going on. They exchanged glances, and some of them felt sorry for Ben; it was so plain that the girl was not interested in Ben to the extent that he was interested in her.

Bob decided to remain near the Vandiver home till he heard from Dick.

To this end he told the youths to take up their quarters in the hayloft of the barn. As it was October and quite cool, this made an ideal place to stay.

Mr. Vandiver said they must eat their meals at the house.

"We have plenty of provisions and plenty of servants to cook them," he told Bob.

The youth thanked him, and said that they would be glad to do this.

"It is a treat, indeed, to us boys to sit down to a table loaded with good, well-cooked food," he said.

The day passed slowly.

The youths were lying on their blankets up in the hay-mow about the middle of the afternoon, when one who had been to the house to get a drink came running in with the information that a strong force of British soldiers was right at hand.

Bob leaped up and peered out through a crack in the side of the barn.

Sure enough, there was quite a large force of British

soldiers coming out of the timber at a point fifty yards from the barn.

"Jove, it is too late to try to make our escape!" said Bob to himself; "we will have to stay here and take our chances on being discovered, and then if we are discovered we will make the best fight that we possibly can."

He did not need to say anything to the youths; they had seized their muskets and were peering out at the redcoats.

"It looks as though we have been caught in a trap, Bob," said Mark Morrison.

"Yes, it does look that way; but we can make a strong fight, just the same."

"So we can."

"Hello, look there!" exclaimed Bob.

"What is it?"

"Dick!"

"Where?"

"There in the midst of that group of soldiers; he is a prisoner!"

"Jove, you're right!"

"Yes; he has gotten into trouble, sure enough!"

"And the way we are fixed we are not going to be able to render him any assistance."

"No, there is danger that we may be in the same fix that he is in before another hour passes."

The British soldiers stopped near the barn and some of them looked within.

"Where did all these horses come from, I wonder?" cried one soldier.

"Surely the man who lives here would not have so many horses as this," from another.

"Not so many saddle-horses at any rate," from a third; "see, here are saddles for every horse."

"There must be some troopers around here!" cried still another soldier.

"Yes, and the chances are that they are rebel troopers, too," from the first speaker.

"But where can they be?"

"At the house; perhaps."

"Yes, or up in the haymow of this barn."

The Liberty Boys heard this and looked meaningly at one another and grasped their muskets tighter.

"Let's see if they are in the hayloft," said one.

"All right."

Then the Liberty Boys heard the trampling of feet on the floor of the barn, and a little later some of the redcoats were heard climbing up the ladder leading to the loft.

Bob gave the boys a signal, and they leveled their muskets in the direction of the hole in the floor, through which the redcoats would come.

CHAPTER VIII.

BOB AS A NEGRO.

Presently a redcoat stuck his head up through the hole and caught sight of the twenty Liberty Boys sitting there with leveled muskets.

He gave utterance to a yell that could have been heard quarter of a mile and let go his hold on the ladder and tumbled backward to the floor, knocking two more of his comrades off the ladder as he went.

The others uttered cries of surprise and the three scrambled to their feet.

"What's the matter with you, you fool?" cried one of the two who had been knocked off the ladder.

"Matter enough," was the growling reply; "the loft full of rebels!"

"Is that so?"

"You don't mean it!"

"I expected as much."

"Are there many of them, sure enough?"

"The loft fairly bristles with bayonets!" was the reply.

"Oh, well; there can't be more than a hundred up there," said one; "go tell the captain and he will have the barn surrounded, and make it impossible for the rebels to escape."

The soldier hastened out of the barn on the errand and the others looked curiously and not a little fearfully up the opening leading to the loft.

When the soldier told the British captain that there were a lot of rebels in the barnloft he was greatly pleased.

"Good!" he cried; "we'll capture them."

Then he ordered that the barn be surrounded so as to make it impossible for the rebels to escape.

When this had been accomplished he entered the barn and approached to a point underneath the opening and called out

"Hello, up there!"

Bob walked boldly to the opening and looked down at the officer.

"Hello, yourself," he said, coolly.

"Are you the commander of the rebels?" the British captain asked, haughtily.

"There are no rebels up here."

"Bosh! we know better."

"You are mistaken, for we are not rebels; we are patriots."

"Bah! it's all the same."

"I don't think so."

"Oh, well, let it go; I call upon you to surrender!"

"That is your privilege; it is our privilege to refuse to do so."

"Why, you would be the biggest kind of fools to offer to resist!"

"I don't think so."

"I know it; why, we have five hundred men outside, and you could not hope to do anything against so many."

"We will make a fight; we will be able to do more than you think, perhaps."

"You will simply get yourself killed, instead of captured; if you wish to bring that about, go ahead."

"Well, that is my idea of warfare—to fight to the death."

"It is the height of folly to try to fight against overwhelming force of numbers."

"No matter; we will fight anyhow."

Bob knew that the redcoats did not know how many there were in the loft, and he felt that by putting on a bold front the capture could be staved off.

Then something might turn up that would make it possible for them to escape.

At this moment there was a stir outside and the murmur of voices. The captain turned and called out:

"What's the matter out there?"

"A strong force of rebels is coming down the road," was the reply.

"How strong is the force?"

"There must be at least a regiment."

"Double our number, eh?"

"Yes."

"Then we had better retreat; we will retire down the road. Give the men orders to do this."

The orders were issued, and then the redcoats retired slowly down the road.

"Hurrah!" cried Bob; "we are all right! Let's go out and see what is going on."

The youths scrambled down out of the hayloft.

The next moment they were out of doors.

Sure enough, a force of patriots was coming.

Their commander was Colonel Burr.

"Was there a force of redcoats here?" he asked of Bob.

"Yes, Colonel Burr," was the reply.

"Where is it now?"

"It retired down the road."

"Then we will go in pursuit."

"We will go with you."

They moved down the road, and about three-quarters of a mile distant they came to a hill, over which the road wound its way.

The patriot scouts who had been sent ahead returned and reported that the British had taken up their position on the hill and were strengthening their position.

Colonel Burr was a brave officer, but a cautious one.

He knew that, although he outnumbered the enemy, the advantage which the British possessed in the way of position would more than counterbalance the preponderance of numeral strength in the patriots' favor.

So he gave the order for his men to retire to the Vandiver home and go into temporary camp.

"We will have to make haste slowly in this matter," he said.

"You are right, sir," said Bob Estabrook; "by the way, the British have Dick Slater a prisoner, and I wish to make an attempt to rescue him."

"Is that so, Bob?"

"Yes, I saw him."

"Well, go ahead and rescue him if you can. You will have to be careful, however, or you may meet with a like fate."

"I will be careful."

Bob at once began figuring on rescuing Dick.

He pondered over the matter a long while, but could not think of any plan.

He could not do anything in the daytime, however, and

so he dismissed the matter from his mind for the time being.

Along toward evening a thought came to him: He would black himself up as a negro and would go to the British encampment and pretend to be a vegetable peddler.

He went to the Vandiver house and told Mrs. Vandiver and Elsie what he thought of doing.

Elsie was delighted with the plan, and offered to help black Bob's face.

"I hope that you will be able to rescue Mr. Slater," she said; "he is a noble-hearted young man, and I hate to think that he is a prisoner in the hands of the British."

"He is as fine a fellow as ever lived," said Bob.

Then he went to work and blacked his hands and face, Elsie doing all she could to help him.

Then he went to a room and donned a ragged suit of clothing that belonged to one of the negro servants.

When he had done this he looked very much like a negro employe of the vicinity.

"Now I will need a basketful of potatoes," he said; "and then I will be ready to go."

He was given a basket and told to go down in the cellar and help himself to the potatoes.

He did so, and then left the house and made a wide detour and approached the British encampment from the opposite direction.

He walked boldly forward, and when the sentinel challenged him he halted and called out

"I'se on'y er nigger whut hez some potaters foah to sell, sah. Lemme go inter de camp, won' yo'?"

"Potatoes, you say? Yes, come along, nigger."

Bob advanced, and the sentinel gave him a careless scrutiny, after which he said:

"Go on in and sell your potatoes if you like."

"Tank yo', massa," said Bob.

Then he moved on and was soon in the heart of the encampment.

The soldiers immediately crowded around Bob, asking eagerly what he had in his basket.

He told them, and they quickly bought all the potatoes he had.

Then they asked him to dance for them.

Bob was a fair dancer, but he pretended that he could not dance.

He wanted to gain time, so that he might have a chance to get Dick located, after which he would try to think of some plan to effect his rescue, if such a thing was possible. "Oh, foah de goodness sakes erlibe, massas, I kain't dance," he declared.

"Bosh," laughed one of the soldiers; "I never saw a nigger that couldn't dance and whistle and sing."

Bob insisted that he could not do either one of the three.

All the time that he was talking he was looking all around covertly, and presently he caught sight of Dick, who was sitting near one of the campfires, his hands bound.

"Good! There he is," thought Bob.

The redcoats were still urging Bob to dance.

"I'll tell yo' what I'll do," the youth said; "I'll try ter sing foah yo'."

"All right," the redcoats said; "go ahead and sing."

Bob's reason for offering to sing was that he might let Dick know he was there. He knew that Dick would recognize his voice, even though he sang in negro dialect; and, too, Bob intended to sing a negro song that they had sung together many a time when they were fishing, swimming or playing together.

He at once struck up the song, and as he had a good voice, the soldiers were delighted.

The instant Bob's voice rose on the evening air Dick gave a start and looked quickly in that direction.

"Great guns, that's Bob!" he said to himself; "I would know his voice anywhere. He is singing that song to let me know he is here."

Dick's heart grew lighter; his spirits rose.

"Perhaps Bob may think of some way to rescue me," he told himself; yet he could not imagine how it could be done.

They were in the heart of the British encampment, and it would seem to be an impossible feat for them to get away.

"I wish I had my hands free," thought Dick.

He began working at his bonds.

All the time Bob was singing Dick was working, and to his joy he managed to loosen the rope sufficiently so that he could withdraw his hands at any moment.

Bob ceased singing and then the soldiers applauded long and loudly.

A great crowd had collected, and Bob saw that only a few remained near the campfire where Dick sat.

"Jove, if Dick was free he might succeed in slipping away or in making a sudden dash and getting away," he thought.

"Sing some more!" the redcoats urged.

Bob felt that he might do some good by continuing to sing. "Dick might succeed in getting his arms free," he thought.

So Bob started in on a rollicking song, and while singing he kept his eyes on Dick.

Suddenly a feeling of delight came over him. He saw Dick leap up and make a dash toward the edge of the encampment.

There was a yell from a redcoat who happened to catch sight of Dick, a musket-shot and then pandemonium.

CHAPTER IX.

A CLEVER SCHEME.

The soldiers dashed after Dick.

They knew he was an important prisoner and wished to recapture him.

They ran with all their might and yelled to him to stop.

Of course, he paid no attention to their commands, and they fired a number of pistol-shots at him.

It would have been an accident had they hit him, however, for they could not take aim when running, and the shots were merely random ones.

Still Dick heard two or three of the bullets whistle past his head.

He soon left the redcoats behind; he felt that he could make his escape without much trouble, and was well pleased.

"Bob did a good thing when he came to the encampment and got the soldiers gathered around him," Dick said to himself.

On he ran.

Soon he had distanced his pursuers and was safe.

The redcoats, finding that it was useless to try to catch up with the fleet-footed Liberty Boy, gave up the chase and went back to the encampment.

When the excitement died down and they looked around for the supposed negro, he was not to be found.

He had disappeared during the excitement.

At once the suspicions of the soldiers were aroused.

They began to smell a rat, so to speak.

"I believe that nigger was a friend of the prisoner," said one of the soldiers.

"Yes, and I begin to believe that he was not a negro at all," said another.

"You think he was a white man blacked up?"

"Yes."

"That is possible; well, he has got away."

Bob was at that moment making his way rapidly toward the Vandiver farmhouse.

He was feeling happy and triumphant.

"Jove, I had better luck than I expected," he said to himself; "I did not really believe that I would be able to rescue Dick. I wouldn't have been, doubtless, but singing attracted the attention of the soldiers and made it possible for him to free his hands and make his escape."

Bob was soon at the farmhouse, and he found Dick there.

"Bob, old man, you did just the right thing!" Dick exclaimed, as he shook the youth's hand. "You gave me the chance I was wanting, and I improved it."

"I am glad that I was able to give you the chance," said Bob.

Elsie Vandiver was delighted. She listened to the story of Dick's escape with interest, as did Mr. and Mrs. Vandiver.

Bob washed the blacking off his face, and then he and Dick went to the patriot encampment, and Dick was given a cordial greeting by Colonel Burr and a joyous greeting by the Liberty Boys.

Colonel Burr asked Dick a number of questions regarding the number of the redcoats, the strength of their position, etc.

Dick told him that it would be a dangerous thing to make an attack, unless they could take the British by surprise.

"Perhaps we may be able to do that," the colonel said.

Dick shook his head.

"It will be difficult," he said.

"What do you think about making a night attack?"

"It will not be practicable," said the Liberty Boy; "they have a triple line of sentinels out, and you could not get past them without being discovered; then the camp would be aroused and you would be given a warm reception."

"But in the daytime they will not have so many sentinels?"

"Oh, no."

"And if we could manage to make a prisoner of one of the sentinels without his giving the alarm, and one of our own men could take his place, then we could slip up and take the British by surprise."

"Yes, sir; perhaps we may be able to do that in the morning."

"I hope so; I would like to strike the redecoats a blow."

Next morning Dick went and reconnoitered the position of the redecoats.

He saw where the sentinels were stationed, and decided upon which one he would try to capture.

He felt that it would be practically impossible to slip up close enough to make an attack without being seen by the sentinel in time to give the alarm, and this made the problem of how he was to be captured a very difficult one.

Dick made his way back toward the Vandiver home, thinking deeply as he went.

He had almost reached the house when he saw Elsie and a girl who lived there—the orphan daughter of a neighbor that had lived near them a few years before—emerge from the kitchen. The girls were carrying a large basket, and in it was a large washing—the week's supply of dirty laundry that was to be taken somewhere to be washed.

Dick started.

An idea had come to him.

He greeted the girls pleasantly, and then asked:

"Where are you going, Miss Elsie?"

"To Old Aunt Chloe's; it is about a mile away over in the timber; she has done our washing for years, and we continue to let her do it for the reason that her living depends upon it. It is inconvenient getting the clothes to and from her cabin, but still we don't mind it much."

"Wait a minute," said Dick; "I have a plan in my mind, and I want to see if you will favor what I am about to suggest."

"We shall be glad to do anything we can to aid you in getting the better of the redecoats, Mr. Slater."

"Very well," said Dick; "there is a British sentinel up yonder that I wish to capture without his having any opportunity to give the alarm, and this basket you are carrying has suggested a plan to my mind. It is this, that we venture up to within, say, seventy-five yards, of the sentinel, and then I will get in the basket and cover up with the clothes, and you girls will carry me to where the sentinel is and set the basket down and engage the redcoat in conversation. While you are talking to him and have his attention attracted I will leap up and knock him senseless. Do you think you can carry out your part of the affair?"

"Yes, indeed," was the reply; "we can and will do so."

"You are sure I am not too heavy for you? I weigh one hundred and fifty pounds."

"We are strong; we can carry you."

"All right; but now, I must ask you to wait a few minutes, till I can get some of the boys to go with us. I will want them to carry the sentinel away after I have knocked him senseless."

"We will wait, Mr. Slater."

Dick hastened to the encampment and told Colonel Burr what he was going to try to do.

The colonel thought that it was a good plan.

"I hope that you will succeed," he said.

"I feel sure that we will do so, sir."

"I shall take it for granted that you will succeed, and will act accordingly. I will order my men to get ready for action."

"Very well; if we succeed some of my Liberty Boys will bring the sentinel to the encampment, and you will know that I am standing guard in his place and that you can approach the enemy's camp without their knowledge till close enough so that you can dash forward and take them by surprise."

"That will be a grand scheme, if it succeeds."

Then Dick went to where the Liberty Boys were quartered and told Bob and three more of the youths to come along with him.

They did so.

They joined the girls, who were waiting patiently.

Ben Bingson was one of the four youths, and he was delighted when he saw Elsie.

She did not show any signs of pleasure because of his presence, however, and Ben's face soon fell, and he looked anything but happy.

Dick noted this, and felt sorry for the youth.

"I believe she does care for him, however," he told himself; "and after awhile she will be kind to him."

Ben and Bob carried the basket till they were within one hundred yards of the sentinel; then they paused, and all stood there, while Dick climbed into the basket and covered himself over with the clothes.

When he was ready the girls took hold of the handles of the basket and lifted.

"Will it be too heavy for you?" asked Bob.

"Oh, no," replied Elsie; "we could carry it half a mile, if necessary."

"Very well; go ahead. Dick has explained to you what you are to do, I suppose?"

"Yes."

The girls then moved along, carrying the basket as though it were not at all heavy, in spite of the fact that it was quite a load.

They entered the road at a point fifty yards from the sentinel and walked toward him.

He saw them coming, thought of course that there could be no harm in a couple of girls carrying a basket of clothes, and did not challenge them at all.

He bowed as they drew near and smiled in his best fashion.

"Good morning, my pretty maidens," he said, with a smirk.

"Good morning, sir," replied Elsie, smiling bewitchingly in return.

Then they placed the basket on the ground.

The brave girls did their work well.

They talked to the sentinel, much to his delight.

They took his musket and examined it with pretended interest.

Dick pushed the cover off the basket, rose up cautiously and dealt the sentinel a blow with the butt of his pistol.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAPTURE OF THE SENTINEL.

The blow was dealt in exactly the right spot, just back of the temple.

The sentinel gave utterance to a gasping moan and dropped limply to the ground, unconscious.

The girls turned slightly pale.

They thought that the man had been killed by the blow.

"Did you—have you—is he—dead?" asked Elsie.

"No, only stunned," replied Dick; "now you girls take your basket and go on your way. I am much obliged for the assistance you have given me."

"You are more than welcome, Mr. Slater."

Then the girls took up the basket and moved away, entering the timber on the farther side of the road and quickly disappearing from sight.

Dick gave utterance to a cautious whistle, and presently the four Liberty Boys were there.

They lifted the unconscious redcoat and carried him in among the trees and quickly removed his outer clothing.

Then Dick removed his outer clothing and donned that of the redcoat, and at the same time the four youths were busily engaged in putting Dick's clothing on the unconscious man.

It was fortunate that the sentinel and Dick were about the same size, and so the exchange of clothing was possible.

"Now, you boys carry the redcoat to our encampment," said Dick; "gag him if he shows signs of returning consciousness before you are well away from here."

"All right, Dick," said Bob.

Then Dick took the sentinel's musket and hastened to the road and took up his position there.

He was on duty now and paced slowly back and forth just as the redcoat would have done.

He did not know at what moment the officer of the guard might happen to look in his direction to see how he was doing, and he did not want that anything in his actions should arouse suspicion that he was not the real sentinel.

He paced back and forth steadily and waited.

He knew it would be nearly an hour before the patriot force would be there ready to advance, and he was fearful

that the trick that had been played might be discovered before the benefits of it could be secured.

Nothing occurred to spoil the plans of the patriots, however.

The force arrived in a little less than an hour, and then a cautious advance was made.

Bob and the Liberty Boys were in the front ranks.

On the patriots moved.

They advanced slowly and cautiously till they were half-way up the hill, and then, fearing that they could not go farther without being seen, they suddenly made a dash forward.

They were within range of the redcoats before their coming was discovered, and then they paused and fired a volley, after which they again charged forward.

The British were taken by surprise.

They had trusted to their sentinels to warn them in time so that they could get ready to fight in case the patriots attacked them, and this was where they had made a mistake.

They fired a volley and then retreated down the farther side of the hill.

They were not routed; they moved along in fairly good order; but they knew that they were outnumbered two to one, and that they had lost the advantage of position through permitting themselves to be taken by surprise, so the only thing to do under the circumstances was to retreat.

The patriots pursued partway down the hillside and then paused and returned to the late encampment of the enemy.

They had beaten the redcoats and put them to flight, and that was what they had wished to do.

They counted the dead and found that seven redcoats had been killed and ten had been wounded.

One patriot had been killed and three were wounded.

A few minutes later a redcoat appeared, carrying a flag of truce, and he asked that the British soldiers be permitted to return and carry away their wounded and bury their dead.

Colonel Burr granted this, and soon a party of redcoats put in an appearance. They buried the dead and carried the wounded away, and then the patriot soldiers, who had buried their dead comrade, carried their wounded comrades back to the encampment near the Vandiver home.

They had a large number of blankets, a goodly number of muskets and some belts in which were small arms that had been left behind by the redcoats, they having left in such haste.

The patriots were to remain here until further orders were received from headquarters at White Plains, so the Liberty Boys decided to remain also.

Dick told the youths how he came to be a prisoner in the hands of the British.

He had gone over to Dobbs Ferry and had gone to the British encampment and shown the letter that had been given him by Captain Mahan.

The redcoats had agreed to accept him as a recruit, but it happened that there was a soldier among them who had

seen Dick down in New York once when he had been spying there and had been captured, and this soldier at once proclaimed the fact that the youth was no other than Dick Slater.

The result was that he was made a prisoner, and when the party of five hundred left Dobbs Ferry and went over to the Vandiver home Dick was sent along with it, a prisoner, to be taken later on to New York.

The rest the reader knows; how he was enabled to make his escape by the appearance of Bob disguised as a negro, who attracted the attention of the British soldiers by singing and gave Dick a chance to get loose and make his escape.

When evening came Dick had a talk with Colonel Burr, and suggested that he again venture over to Dobbs Ferry and try to learn the plans of the British.

Colonel Burr told him that he might do so.

"Go ahead," he said. "But be careful; don't let them catch you again."

"I will see to it that they don't do that, Colonel Burr."

Then Dick left the encampment and made his way in the direction of Dobbs Ferry.

As good luck would have it he found some British soldiers in a tavern there drinking.

Dick managed to keep them from seeing his face, as they would have recognized him, and he heard them telling one another that this was the last time they would drink in that tavern.

The British army was to march toward the south on the morrow, they said, and Dick finally gathered that it was the intention of the British commander to attack Fort Washington.

"So that is what is in the wind, eh?" he remarked to himself; "well, I'm glad that I have found it out."

He did not remain much longer, for he had secured the information that was needed, and he felt that he ought to get the news to Colonel Burr and then to General Washington as quickly as possible.

When he did start to go he met with an unpleasant surprise.

Just as he was about to open the door to pass out, it opened and he found himself face to face with some redcoats.

One of these recognized Dick instantly.

"Dick Slater, the rebel spy!" he cried.

Of course, this attracted the attention of all within the room to him.

Excited exclamations escaped the lips of all.

For a few moments Dick was motionless, almost paralyzed, but his mind was working, and he glanced around for some means of escape.

Near the end of the bar was a trapdoor which led to the cellar.

The trapdoor happened to be open at the time, the landlord having been down there recently to get some liquor.

Dick thought it possible that he might manage to escape if he could get down into the cellar, and he bounded toward the opening.

This aroused the redcoats and they leaped forward and tried to seize him.

He evaded their grasp and leaped down through the trapdoor.

He was down the stairs at two leaps.

It was quite dark in the cellar, but Dick moved along as rapidly as possible.

He hoped to find a door that would lead to out of doors.

He felt his way along, and was soon at the end of the cellar.

By this time the redcoats were pouring down into the cellar, eager to capture him.

"You can't get away," called out one; "so you might as well stop trying, and surrender."

"Bring a light, landlord," called out another.

Dick was feeling around and at this moment found a door.

That it opened upon a set of stairs leading to the outer air he was certain.

He pulled at the door.

It resisted his efforts, and then he felt along the edge of the door and found a wooden peg that was stuck slantingly into a hole bored beside the jam. This peg was what held the door shut, and Dick pulled the peg out and again gave a yank at the door.

It came open.

At the same instant the cellar was lighted up. The landlord had come downstairs with a candle in his hand.

As Dick passed through the doorway the redcoats caught sight of him.

"There he is!"

"Stop him!"

"Catch him!"

"He will get away!"

Such were a few of the exclamations, and the redcoats dashed forward in an attempt to grab Dick before he could get out of the cellar.

They failed, however.

Dick was out of the cellar and leaping up the steps before the British soldiers could get to him.

"Stop, or we'll fire!" yelled one.

But Dick would not stop. He was determined to escape. He pushed the outside doors open and leaped out into the back yard.

After him came the redcoats, yelling to him to stop.

They might as well have saved their breath.

Dick dashed away at the top of his speed.

The redcoats poured up out of the cellar and started in pursuit.

Fearing that the patriot youth would escape, the redcoats began firing at him.

They would rather kill him than let him get away.

The bullets whistled all around the youth.

Luckily none took effect, and he continued to run at the top of his speed.

He quickly distanced his pursuers, and as it was dark and they could not see, he was soon out of danger.

The redcoats realized the uselessness of trying to catch

the fleet-footed rebel, and gave up the pursuit and went back to the tavern.

Dick continued onward, and half an hour later was at the patriot encampment.

He went to Colonel Burr and told him what he had heard the redcoats say.

"So an attack is to be made on Fort Washington, eh?" the colonel said; "the commander-in-chief ought to know this."

"Yes, indeed."

"You will carry the news to him?"

"Yes, Colonel Burr."

"I judge that there is no need for haste, however; so you might as well wait till morning."

"Very well."

CHAPTER XI.

"DOG EAT DOG."

Next morning Dick mounted his horse and set out for North Castle, to which point the patriot army had removed.

He arrived there in due time and went at once to the house in which General Washington had taken up his quarters.

He was given a pleasant greeting, for the commander-in-chief thought a great deal of Dick.

"What is the news, my boy?" he asked.

Dick told him.

General Washington listened with interest, and then looked thoughtfully at the floor.

"The attack is not to be made on the fort right away, I feel certain," he said, presently; "so the thing to do is to keep a close watch on the enemy and see to it that the garrison is not taken by surprise."

General Washington opened a little portable desk that he always carried with him and took out paper, ink and quill. Then he wrote a letter, which he sealed and addressed to the commander of the garrison at Fort Washington.

He gave this letter to Dick.

"Go to Fort Washington and give that letter to the commander there," he told the youth.

"Very well, your excellency," was the reply.

The commander-in-chief kept Dick there an hour longer, asking questions of him, and then told him he might go.

The youth bade the great man goodbye, saluted and took his departure.

He mounted his horse and set out.

He got back to the patriot encampment near the Vandiver home just about noon.

Mr. Vandiver invited Dick and Colonel Burr to take dinner at the house, and they accepted the invitation, with thanks.

After dinner Dick mounted his horse and set out toward the south.

He rode along at a lively pace, and mile after mile was gone over.

Dick kept a sharp lookout, for he was in a dangerous locality.

Not only was there danger of meeting parties of redcoats, but there were the cowboys and skimmers to look out for.

These latter pretended to be partisan parties, either in favor of the king or against him, but the truth of the matter was that they were more interested in robbing people than in anything else.

Suddenly, as he rounded a bend in the road, he found himself confronted by about a dozen rough-looking fellows, who leveled rifles and muskets and ordered him to halt.

He did so, though it went against the grain to obey such fellows.

"Who are you fellows, and what do you want?" Dick asked.

"We air ther bosses uv this heer bit uv road," replied one, evidently the leader; "an' ever'buddy whut goes erlong heer hez ter donate some munny fur ter he'p keep ther road in good condishun fur travel."

"In other words," said Dick, scornfully, "you are robbers."

The ruffians grinned.

"Well, ye kin call et thet ef ye want,er," the leader said; "we don' keer whut ye call et, jes' so's we git ther munny."

"How much money does one have to pay for the privilege of riding over this stretch of road?"

"All ther munny ye hev got."

"Oh, that's it, eh?"

"Yas. Ye see, ye may never hev ter pay but ther wunst, an' so we make ever'buddy contribert all they hev."

"Supposing I refuse?"

"Then we'll put some bullets inter ye, an' he'p ourselves arterwards."

"You really mean to say that you would shoot me?"

"Ye bet!"

"But that would be murder."

"Oh, no; that would be simply convincin' ye thet et don' pay ter be stubborn."

Dick did not like the idea of yielding and permitting the cowboys—for such they were—to take his money; but at the same time he realized that it was hardly worth his while to risk losing his life just to save a few pieces of silver, so he said:

"All right; I will give you all the money I have. I am in a hurry and don't want to lose any more time than I can possibly help."

"Thet's senserble; git down offen yer hoss an' we'll go through yer pockets."

Dick thought of the letter to the commander of Fort Washington; if the cowboys looked in his pockets they would find this letter, and he did not want it to fall into their hands.

"I will give you all the money I have," he said; "there is no need of my getting off my horse."

"Thet won' do, young feller; ye'd keep back most uv

ther munny. Ye see, we hev ter 'tend ter sech things our-sefs, ef we want ter git whut is comin' ter us."

At this moment there came shots from the roadside, and two of the cowboys fell to the ground, dead or wounded.

Then a party of perhaps a dozen men rushed out from among the trees and attacked the cowboys.

"Skinners!" said Dick to himself; "well, perhaps I shall be able to get away while they are fighting. It is a game of dog eat dog, for they are robbers, the same as is the case with the cowboys."

Dick was on the alert for the chance to get away.

At present the cowboys and skinners occupied the road and were fighting hand-to-hand, but presently the skinners began to get the upper hand and force the cowboys back, and this left the road almost clear.

It was Dick's opportunity, and he improved it.

He urged his horse forward and the animal leaped into a gallop at once.

The Liberty Boy was past the combatants before they realized what had occurred, and then, realizing that they could not catch him, the cowboys and skinners went ahead with their fight with renewed fierceness.

There was bad blood between the cowboys and skinners.

It was not so much because they represented the two sides of the great controversy, but because they were rivals in the business of robbing.

They fought fiercely, but at last the cowboys were worsted and they took refuge in flight.

Meanwhile, Dick was riding onward at a gallop.

The attack by the skinners had come at an opportune time, for him, and he was grateful to them in a way.

On he rode.

At last he reached the Harlem River and crossed it on the bridge.

He had feared that he would encounter some redecoats near this bridge, but did not do so, and he felt much relieved.

"I guess that I am to reach Fort Washington without further adventure," he told himself.

He was right. He arrived at the fort safely and without having had any further trouble.

He entered the fort, and was shown to the quarters occupied by Colonel Magaw, the commander of the garrison.

After they had exchanged greetings Dick handed the colonel the letter.

The officer opened it and read the contents.

"So the British are going to come and try to capture the fort, eh?" the colonel remarked.

"Yes, sir."

"The commander-in-chief says for us to be on our guard and not permit ourselves to be taken by surprise."

Then the colonel had a long talk with Dick. He asked a great many questions, and at last had a very good-idea of the general situation.

Dick soon bade the colonel goodbye and took his departure.

It was now getting well along toward evening, but Dick did not mind. He felt that he could safely travel at night,

and that he would not have much difficulty in reaching the patriot encampment near the Vandiver home.

It was dark by the time he arrived at the Harlem River. He crossed and rode onward.

When he got in among the trees, the country, being pretty heavily timbered, it was so dark he could scarcely see his hand before his face.

He did not try to guide his horse, but permitted the animal to choose his own course.

Dick rode onward an hour and a half, at least, and then he caught sight of a light over toward the left.

It was moving, and Dick quickly decided that someone was carrying a lantern.

He was interested in the matter, without really knowing why, and, acting on impulse, decided to investigate and see who the person was.

He leaped to the ground, led his horse in among the trees and tied him.

Then the youth set out in the direction of the light, which he caught occasional brief glimpses of, through the timber.

He walked rapidly, and at last found himself within one hundred yards of the man carrying the lantern.

The man continued onward until he came to the top of a hill, and here he stopped. Dick followed till he reached the top of the hill, but he took up his position at a point perhaps twenty yards from the man he was watching.

Then, to Dick's surprise, the man began climbing a tree. He carried the lantern with him.

"What in the world is he going to do with the lantern?" the youth asked himself.

He watched the fellow closely.

Up and still up the man toiled, until he was near the top of the tree, and then he paused and waved the lantern three times.

Dick watched this proceeding with wondering eyes.

"Now what is he doing that for?" he asked himself.

He quickly realized that the waving of the lantern was a signal to somebody, but to whom?

That was a question that he could not answer.

A sudden thought struck Dick: If the man was signaling, doubtless there would be an answering signal from somewhere, and he made up his mind to see whence this signal would come, if possible.

He at once began climbing a tall tree which stood near.

Dick was an expert at this kind of work, for he had been reared in the timber and had climbed trees all his life.

He was quickly in the top of the tree, and then he glanced across to the tree the man was in.

The fellow was just in the act of swinging the lantern again.

"The first signal was not answered," thought Dick; "now I may see where the answer comes from if I watch closely."

He noted that the man with the lantern was facing toward the west, and so he looked in that direction.

As he did so he gave a start.

Seemingly half a mile away he saw a light. It was a

single light, like that of a lantern, and it remained stationary a few moments and was then swung in a circle in the air three times.

By its light Dick was sure that he made out what looked to be the mast of a sloop or schooner, and he at once leaped to the conclusion that the person signaling in return was on board a vessel of some kind down on the Hudson River, which, Dick knew, was about half a mile away.

As soon as this signal had been made the man with the lantern began climbing down out of the tree, and Dick did the same.

They reached the ground at about the same time, and the man strode away, going back in the same direction from which he had come.

Dick stood there hesitating.

Should he follow the man?

He wished to know who the fellow was and where he lived, but he was curious, also, to know what was going on over by the river.

He decided to go there and see if he could learn what was going on.

He set out, and twenty minutes later was standing on the bank of the Hudson.

He was sure that he was close to the point where the vessel lay.

Presently he heard the sound of oars, and a little later he heard voices, the latter coming from among the trees which bordered the river.

Dick was interested, and stood there among the bushes waiting and watching. He thought it likely that he would soon see or hear something of interest.

CHAPTER XII.

INTERNAL DISSENSIONS.

Soon a party consisting of a dozen men appeared close beside Dick. One of their number carried a lantern and the others of the party carried heavy loads in the shape of one or more bags, which were filled with goods that had been stolen from the settlers of the vicinity, Dick was sure, for he felt confident that the men were cowboys.

Soon a boat grated on the sandy beach and a couple of men leaped out and greeted the members of the robber band.

"Got a good load for us this time?" asked one of the men who had been in the boat.

"Yes," replied one of the cowboys; "have you got the money to pay for the goods?"

"Of course. How do the goods run, about like the average that you have been bringing?"

"Yes, just about the same."

"Very well; we will pay you the same price per bag; how many bags are there?"

"Fourteen."

"Good enough; I will give you the money; have you men put the bags in the boat."

The leader of the cowboys told his companions to put the bags in the boat, and they did so.

Then the man handed over the amount of money agreed upon and the leader of the cowboys pocketed it with a grin of satisfaction.

"When will you have another load for me?" the other asked.

"I don't know; in about a week, though, I think."

"Well, we will be back here a week from to-night, and will lie here and watch for the signal."

"All right."

Then the men got into the boat and his companion followed suit, after which they took the oars and rowed out into the stream.

The cowboys walked into the timber and moved away at a moderate pace, and Dick followed them.

He was determined to learn where their hiding-place, or rendezvous was, and then he would get his Liberty Boys and they would come and capture the rascals, or kill them.

He followed the men without any trouble, for they were not expecting to be followed. They did not think of such a thing as that they had been seen.

Dick kept close at their heels till they came to a good-sized log house deep in the woods.

They entered this cabin, and Dick crept close up to the wall and hunted around till he found a crack through which he could peer.

He saw the men seated about a long table in the center of the room. On the table was a large amount of money, or at least a goodly number of silver pieces.

The men were dividing this money.

There were thirteen of the men, and Dick judged that the extra man was the one he had seen climb the tree and signal to the men on the sloop.

Dick listened to their talk long enough to learn that they really were cowboys—or, more properly speaking, robbers—and then he took his departure.

He had some difficulty in finding his way back to where he had left his horse, but finally succeeded in doing so.

He had been careful to remember the direction he had come, so that he could find his way back again.

He untied his horse, led him to the road, mounted and rode toward the north.

It was so dark he could not go fast, but he finally arrived at the patriot encampment.

He went to the quarters occupied by the Liberty Boys and told them that he had some work for them to do.

When they learned what the work was they were delighted.

"We'll go and capture or kill those scoundrels," said Bob, enthusiastically. "They have been permitted to go ahead with their nefarious work too long already."

"You are right," agreed Dick.

Then the youths, to the number of twenty—Dick feeling sure that this would be a sufficient number—bridled and saddled their horses and the little party rode away.

They rode to the point where Dick had left his horse when he followed the man with the lantern, and here they dismounted and led the animals in among the trees.

After the horses had been tied Dick led the way through the timber.

It was slow work, for he had to be very careful. He might easily miss the way.

He was so used to the timber, however, that it was easier for him to find his way there than it would have been had he been in a prairie country, and at last they came to the log house in which the cowboys had their rendezvous.

They stole close up to the cabin and looked in. The cowboys were still up, and they were seated at the long table.

At least half a dozen large, black bottles were on the table, and three or four packs of cards were in use, for the cowboys were gambling.

They were now engaged in trying to rob one another of the money that had come to each as his share of the total amount received for the stolen property.

The Liberty Boys watched the gamblers with lively feelings of disgust and anger.

"They deserve to be wiped off the face of the earth!" whispered Bob Estabrook.

"I guess you are not far wrong," whispered Dick in reply.

He was thinking of telling the youths to surround the cabin and get ready to break down the door and attack the cowboys, when there was an uproar within the building.

Two of the men had quarreled over the game and had then come to blows. The others had taken sides, and the result was that in less than a minute a combat involving all the cowboys was in progress.

"Great guns! there is a fight and we are not in it!" exclaimed Bob, regretfully.

"It is all the better," said Dick; "let them fight it out, and if they kill one another it will save us a disagreeable task."

Soon from fist-cuffs the cowboys fell to using stools as weapons, and then knives and pistols were brought into play. The men had been drinking, and were ripe for a fight to the death, and this was what it bade fair to be.

Soon the cracking of pistols was heard, and then groans and cries of pain and anger rose on the air.

Fearing that the bullets might come through the cracks between the logs and kill or wound some of his Liberty Boys, Dick made them withdraw to a safe distance, much to Bob's disgust.

"Say, Dick, I wanted to see the fight," he protested; "there is no danger."

"Oh, yes, there is; we would be in more danger from the bullets than the ones they were intended for."

Presently the pistols ceased cracking, but the sounds continued to be heard. The weapons had all been fired off and the combatants had to fight it out hand-to-hand.

At last the sounds ceased, with the exception of groan-

ings, and the Liberty Boys advanced and tried the door. It was not fastened, and the youths opened it and entered the cabin.

A candle was burning on the rude slab-mantel over the fireplace, but the candles that had been on the table had been extinguished, the table having been upset in the melee.

The Liberty Boys looked about them.

Four of the cowboys were dead, three were seriously wounded, while three more were unconscious and slightly wounded; two only did not seem to be wounded, but they sat on the floor panting as a result of their exertions.

They stared at the Liberty Boys in wonder.

"Who are you?" one asked.

"We are members of the company of Liberty Boys," replied Dick.

"What do you want here?"

"We came to do what you have done for one another."

The two looked surprised.

"What do you mean?"

Dick told him and the two looked disconcerted.

"I am glad that you attended to this matter yourselves," went on Dick; "it has saved us the trouble of doing it."

Then he told the youths to gather up the money which had been scattered over the floor when the table was upset, and they did as told. The two cowboys protested, saying the money belonged to them, but Dick sternly told them that the money really belonged to the people from whom the goods had been stolen that had been given in exchange for the money.

"There is more money somewhere about here, too, I'll wager," said Dick; "and you must tell us where it is hidden."

The two protested that such was not the case.

"That is all the money we had," one declared.

The youths did not believe this, however, and Dick ordered that a search be made. This was done, and a bag of silver was found under one of the stones of the hearth.

"Now," said Dick; "you fellows will have to look after your wounded companions and bury the dead ones. We are going back to where we came from. Another thing: If you are wise you will cease this work you have been engaged upon. Stop robbing the people of this vicinity; if you don't we will hunt you down and finish up this work that you have so well begun yourselves."

The two did not have much to say; they simply scowled and eyed the Liberty Boys sullenly.

The loose silver that had been gathered up off the floor had been put in a bag, and now, with the two bags in their possession, the Liberty Boys took their departure.

"I am disappointed," grumbled Bob, when they had gone a little distance; "I wanted to have a hand in meting out justice to those rascally cowboys."

"It is better as it is, Bob," said Dick; "I am glad that we did not have to do the work."

"Perhaps you are right."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEGRO SPY.

"Hello, I don't understand this, Bob."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, I expected that the British army would be gone from here, but it isn't."

"That's so; you did say that you thought the British were going down to make an attack on Fort Washington."

"Yes; but they are still here."

"Perhaps they have decided to give up the idea of making the attack."

"I don't know; well, we will watch them, and when they do break camp and start we will get the news to General Washington as quickly as possible."

Dick Slater and Bob Estabrook had gone over to Dobbs Ferry to see if the British had broken camp; it was the day after the night on which they went after the cowboys. They found the enemy still encamped there, and it occasioned considerable surprise in Dick's mind. He had expected that the British would be gone.

They remained where they were an hour or more, and then Dick said:

"There is no need of both of us staying here all the time, Bob."

"No, I suppose not," was the reply.

"Certainly not; and I would suggest that we take turns watching the British."

"What will the other do, old man?"

"He will go home and see Alice and the folks."

"That's a good plan; though I think sister must be getting along all right; if this were not so the folks would have sent for us."

"Yes, I guess they would. But it may do her good and cheer her up if we go and see her."

"No doubt about that, Dick; well, you go first. I will stay here and watch the redcoats."

"Very well."

Then Dick cautioned Bob to be careful and not let the redcoats capture him, after which he said goodby and hastened away.

He went back to the encampment near the Vandiver home, told Colonel Burr that the British were still encamped near Dobbs Ferry, and then mounted his horse and rode away in the direction of Tarrytown.

When he arrived at the home of his widowed mother and his sister, he dismounted and entered.

"How is Alice?" he asked, eagerly, as he kissed his mother.

"Much better, Dick; and she will be delighted to see you."

"I will go right over there," he said, as he kissed Edith.

He went out, made his way through the orchard, and was soon at the Estabrook home.

He entered and was given a pleasant greeting by Mr. and Mrs. Estabrook. Then he went into the sick room with the

latter and found Alice sitting up in bed looking pale but bright.

At sight of Dick she gave utterance to an exclamation of delight.

"Oh, Dick! I am so glad that you have come!"

"So am I, little sweetheart!" said Dick.

Then he sat down on the edge of the bed, took Alice's hand in his and kissed her tenderly.

"You are better, Alice," he said.

"Oh, yes; I will soon be well, Dick."

They talked quite a good deal, for Alice was strong enough so that it did not hurt her, and Dick remained till noon, though he insisted that he must go back home and take dinner with his mother and sister.

"I'll be back over to tell you goodby before I go away," he told Alice.

Then he went home and ate dinner with Mrs. Slater and Edith.

"I am going back after dinner," he told them; "and Bob will come to spend the rest of the day. We are taking turns watching the redcoats at Dobbs Ferry."

He talked half an hour or such a matter after dinner was over, and then he went back to the Estabrook home and bade Alice and her parents goodby and told them that Bob would be home in a couple of hours.

This pleased Mr. and Mrs. Estabrook.

Then Dick went back to his home, mounted his horse after bidding his mother and sister goodby, and rode away.

An hour later he was with Bob, not far from the British encampment, and Bob lost no time in getting to the patriot encampment. Here he mounted his horse and rode in the direction of his home.

He remained at home and at the Slater home with Edith, his sweetheart, until after supper, and then he returned to the patriot encampment.

The British remained encamped near Dobbs Ferry a week longer, and then it broke camp and marched away toward the south.

Dick and Bob happened to both be watching when this took place, and Dick at once told Bob to go to the patriot encampment, tell Colonel Burr, and then to mount his horse and go to North Castle and tell General Washington the news.

"All right, Dick," said Bob, and then he was off.

Dick watched the redcoats till they were on the march and then he followed them.

He did not lose sight of them until they had gone into camp about a mile east of Fort Washington, on Manhattan Island, and then he made his way to the fort and told Colonel Magaw the news.

"I think that an attack will be made soon," he said.

"I judge that you are right; well, we will keep a sharp lookout, and if we think it useless to offer resistance we will evacuate the fort and cross the river to Fort Lee."

Dick, having done his work, took his departure and made his way back to the patriot encampment near the Vandiver home.

Colonel Burr had been on the point of breaking camp

and following the British arm down to its present location, but a messenger had arrived from North Castle with an order from General Washington that the colonel take his force and go across the river and over into New Jersey to join a force that was encamped there.

There was only one thing to do, and that was to obey orders, so he gave the command for the soldiers to break camp and get ready to march.

They did so, and presently the force marched away toward Dobbs Ferry, at which point it was to cross the river.

Dick and the Liberty Boys did not go with Colonel Burr's force.

Dick was acting independently, now that he was not with the main army, and he preferred to go down onto Manhattan Island and keep watch of the redcoats there, with the intention of helping the garrison hold Fort Washington in case an attack was made.

The youths encamped just north of the Harlem River.

They did not think it wise to get too near to the British force.

"We will remain here and will keep watch on the enemy and be ready to move at a moment's notice," said Dick.

To the surprise of Dick and the Liberty Boys the British simply remained quietly in camp for several days, doing nothing.

"What are they going to do, anyway?" asked Bob, grumblingly, one evening.

"That is a question I would like to have answered," said Dick.

That evening he left camp and went to spy on the British.

He did not learn anything; the enemy was quiet; it seemed that the British had no intention of making any move.

Dick was gone only an hour or such matter, and when he got back he found the Liberty Boys applauding the dancing of a negro.

The colored fellow was a good dancer, and he seemed to enjoy the work, for he kept it up at a lively rate. At last he said he was tired, however, and that he must be going.

He bade the Liberty Boys good-night and took his departure.

"I believe that fellow is a spy!" said Dick. "I am going to follow him."

He left the encampment and hurried after the negro.

The latter had gone away whistling and was still at it, so Dick had no difficulty in keeping on his track.

As he more than half expected, the negro went straight to the British encampment.

"He has carried the news of our presence in the vicinity to the British commander," Dick told himself; "now I wonder if they will send a force to try to capture us?"

He decided to remain and find out.

He did so.

He soon saw that the soldiers were stirring.

He watched closely.

Half an hour later he saw a force leave the encampment.

There were at least two hundred soldiers in the party.

"The negro told them how many there were of us and all about us," thought Dick; "well, they will not take us by surprise, after all, and the chances are that we will take them by surprise."

He turned and hastened back in the direction of the bridge over the Harlem River, and, crossing the stream, he made his way to the Liberty Boys' encampment.

"I was right, boys," he said; "the negro went straight to the British encampment, and a force is now coming to try to capture us."

"How strong a force, Dick?" asked Bob.

"There are about two hundred men."

"Well, we can thrash them."

"Yes, by taking them by surprise."

"We can do that."

"So we can; we will go to the bridge across the Harlem and give them a warm reception as they come off the bridge.

"That's the thing to do, Dick!"

The Liberty Boys were ready to move within five minutes of the time Dick appeared among them.

They marched on the double-quick, and were hidden near the north end of the bridge when the redcoats put in an appearance.

It was a clear night, and although there was no moon, it was possible to see the dark figures of the soldiers as they were outlined against the horizon.

"Wait till they come off the bridge and then give them a volley," was the order Dick gave the youths.

They waited, and presently the trampling of many feet was heard.

The redcoats were approaching the end of the bridge.

The dark, moving mass was visible, and the Liberty Boys took aim and waited for the signal.

Presently the redcoats were coming off the bridge, and Dick decided that it was time to get to work.

He gave the signal to fire.

It was a shrill, quavering whistle, and the instant the boys heard it they pulled trigger.

Crash! Roar!

The volley rang out loudly on the still night air.

Then followed yells, shrieks and groans.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE CAPTURE OF FORT WASHINGTON.

The volley had done a great deal of damage.

A number of the redcoats were killed and wounded.

The others were temporarily paralyzed, so to speak, for they had not been expecting anything like this.

They had expected to take the Liberty Boys by surprise, and instead of this, they were themselves taken by surprise.

Before they could recover from their temporarily dazed state the Liberty Boys drew their pistols and fired two more volleys.

This aroused the British soldiers, and they fired a volley in return.

The Liberty Boys were sheltered by trees, bushes and stones, however, and they were not much damaged.

"Now give it to them with the other pistols!" cried Dick.

All the Liberty Boys carried four pistols, instead of only two, and the youths drew the other two weapons and fired two more volleys.

This was too much for the redcoats.

They had not expected any such turn to affairs and were not prepared for it, so they turned and fled back across the bridge as fast as they could go.

The Liberty Boys gave utterance to a yell of triumph.

"We have won!" cried Bob.

"After them!" cried Dick; "chase them back to their encampment, my brave boys!"

The youths obeyed, and chased the redcoats across the bridge.

They would have continued the pursuit, but Dick thought it best that they should not do so.

He ordered them to cease the pursuit, and they obeyed.

Knowing that the redcoats would soon return and that in all probability they would come in much stronger force, Dick ordered the youths to return to the encampment.

"I think we had better move our camp," he said; "they know where it is and will be wild to get revenge on us for the way we have handled them."

The youths broke camp and then moved away toward the east.

They went a mile and then again went into camp.

They did not think it likely that the redcoats would find their new camp. Dick's idea was that the British would think that the patriot force would flee and would get far away, and so no search would be made in the vicinity.

In thus thinking he was right; that was exactly what the redcoats did think.

They contented themselves with taking care of their wounded and burying the dead; then they returned to their encampment, breathing threats of what they would do to the rebels if they got a chance at them.

Several days passed, and then on the 15th of November the British broke camp and marched over and appeared before Fort Washington.

The British commander sent word in to Colonel Magaw that, unless he surrendered, the entire garrison would be put to the sword.

The brave officer sent word back that if General Howe wanted the fort he would have to come and take it.

The Liberty Boys had learned of the move of the redcoats in time so that they had reached the fort before the British appeared there.

They were on hand now, ready and eager to fight.

The one hundred youths added a great deal to the strength of the garrison.

They were equal to three or four times their number of ordinary soldiers.

They were youths who did not know the meaning of the word fear, and they would fight to the last gasp if necessary.

When the colonel sent back the message that Howe would have to come and take the fort if he wanted it, the Liberty Boys were delighted. This was the kind of talk they liked to hear.

"We have a strong position," said Dick; "and they will have hard work getting the better of us, even though they outnumber us four or five to one."

"True," agreed Colonel Magaw.

The British, in spite of Howe's declaration that unless the patriots surrendered they would be put to the sword, did not seem to be very eager to make an attack.

They realized that it would be no easy matter to storm the works and capture the garrison.

So General Howe called a council of war, and the members of his staff gathered at his quarters and the matter of making an attack was taken up and discussed earnestly.

There was some difference of opinion, but at last all agreed that the attack should be made.

It was decided to make the attack on the morrow.

They advanced to the attack next day, and soon the battle was under way.

It was a desperate battle.

The patriots, although outnumbered so greatly, fought with desperate valor, and the redcoats were held at bay a long time.

The Liberty Boys fought like demons.

They did three times as much as might have been expected of them.

But force of numbers at last prevailed, and Colonel Magaw, to save his men from being slaughtered, surrendered.

The instant he did this Dick and the Liberty Boys left the fort at the rear and made a dash down the slope.

They had to force their way through a cordon of soldiers, but they were desperate and came with such a rush and threw themselves upon the redcoats with such restless fury that their advance could not be stayed.

They succeeded in getting through and away, and although hardly one among them but what was wounded more or less severely, they were feeling pretty good.

"We certainly did our share of the work of defending the fort," said Bob.

"Yes, we did our part, Bob," agreed Dick.

"I am sorry the redcoats have captured the fort, though."

"So am I."

The youths made their way to the bridge across the Harlem River and then on to where they had been encamped. Their horses were here, so they mounted them and set out.

"Where are we going, Dick?" asked Bob.

"We are going to Dobbs Ferry, where we will cross the Hudson River," was the reply; "then we will go on down to Fort Lee."

"Ah, you think the redcoats may cross the river and try to capture Fort Lee?"

"Yes."

"Say, it won't be out of our way to go past home, will it?" asked Bob.

"No; we are going that way; I want to stop and see how Alice is."

This suited Bob first rate. He was eager to see Edith Slater again before leaving that part of the country, and of course, he would be glad to see his sister and know that she was getting well.

When they arrived at their homes Dick called a halt, and the youths dismounted and tied their horses.

Then Dick and Bob spent an hour with their sweethearts, after which they spoke the farewells, mounted, the other Liberty Boys doing the same, and rode onward.

They went past the Vandiver home, also; it was on their way, so they could do this as well as not.

Elsie was glad they stopped; this was plain. Ben Bings-ton was glad also. The girl did not treat him with any very great amount of warmth, however. He was not yet restored to her favor.

They remained there half an hour, and then mounted and rode onward.

They were not long in arriving at Dobbs Ferry, where they had to wait half an hour for the ferry-boat to come back across the river, it being on the farther side.

The youths were an odd-looking lot. Scarcely one among them that did not have a wound bound up with white cloth, and they looked like a lot of hospital patients out for an airing. They had had their wounds dressed at the homes of Dick and Bob.

They did not mind the wounds, however, and they talked and laughed in as lively a strain as was usual with them.

The boat came across presently, and then the work of ferrying them over was begun.

This took quite awhile, but at last all the youths were across, and then they rode away toward the south.

The youths arrived at Fort Lee that evening and were given a warm welcome by General Green, who was in command there.

General Washington had been there, but had gone to the main patriot encampment three miles to the westward.

"You boys were in the battle over at the fort," said General Greene, eagerly; "I know you were," he added; "your bandages proclaim the fact."

"Yes, we were in the fort during the battle," replied Dick.

Then he told the story of the affair, and the general and the other officers listened with interest.

Then they discussed the situation.

Dick told them that he thought it likely that the British

would cross the river and come and try to capture Fort Lee, but General Greene said he did not think that this would be done.

"Still," he said; "it will be well to keep a sharp lookout for the redcoats. We must not let them take us by surprise."

"If they come they will cross the river above here," said Dick; "and I will agree to let you know of their coming in plenty of time so that you will be able to escape."

"Very well."

Dick then began the work of watching the British, and on the 19th he saw them crossing the river at a point five miles up the stream.

He at once hastened back to Fort Lee and told General Greene that the British were coming in force.

This was the signal for great activity in the fort.

General Greene gave the order to break camp and march away at the earliest possible moment.

The soldiers obeyed, and all was bustle and confusion.

The British were close at hand when the patriots were ready to evacuate, and it became a case of flight and pursuit.

The patriots were fresher than the redcoats, however, and so were enabled to keep out of harm's way.

Across the bridge over the Hackensack River went the patriot soldiers, and after them went the British.

When the main patriot encampment was reached, however, the patriots stopped and the British also paused. They came to the conclusion that it would be better not to risk a battle at this time.

General Washington was glad that General Green and his men had escaped from Fort Lee in time.

"It would have been a terrible blow had you been captured," he said; "on top of the disaster of Fort Washington, it would have been calamitous, indeed."

"You are right, your excellency," said General Greene. The British paused and went into camp about a mile from the patriot encampment.

Here they remained two days, and then on the 21st General Washington gave the order for the patriot army to retreat toward Newark.

The order was obeyed, and the British followed the patriot army as closely as they dared.

This was the beginning of the famous march across New Jersey, which did not end until the patriot army had taken refuge behind the Delaware River, in Pennsylvania.

History tells the story of this retreat, and there is no need of telling of it here. Suffice it to say that the sufferings of the patriot soldiers, as they marched almost bare-

footed over the frozen and snow-covered ground, was such as to be almost unendurable, and whenever one thinks of this it is to feel a thrill of admiration for the brave men who practically martyred themselves in order that we who were to come after them should enjoy freedom and independence.

Alice Estabrook got well, and was the same rosy-cheeked, lively and jolly girl as of yore the next time Dick saw her.

The band of cowboys that had fought in the old cabin and whose members had killed one another till less than half their number were left alive, never did any more work as a band.

Elsie Vandiver, hearing how Ben Bington fought bravely till the end of the war, relented and gave him her heart and hand, and he was the happiest young fellow in the state.

Years later they often told their children the story of

how Elsie had helped to capture a British sentinel by carrying Dick Slater to the spot covered over in a clothes-basket.

THE END.

The next number (186) of "The Liberty Boys of '76" will contain "THE LIBERTY BOYS ON THE HUDSON; OR, WORKING ON THE WATER," by Harry Moore.

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